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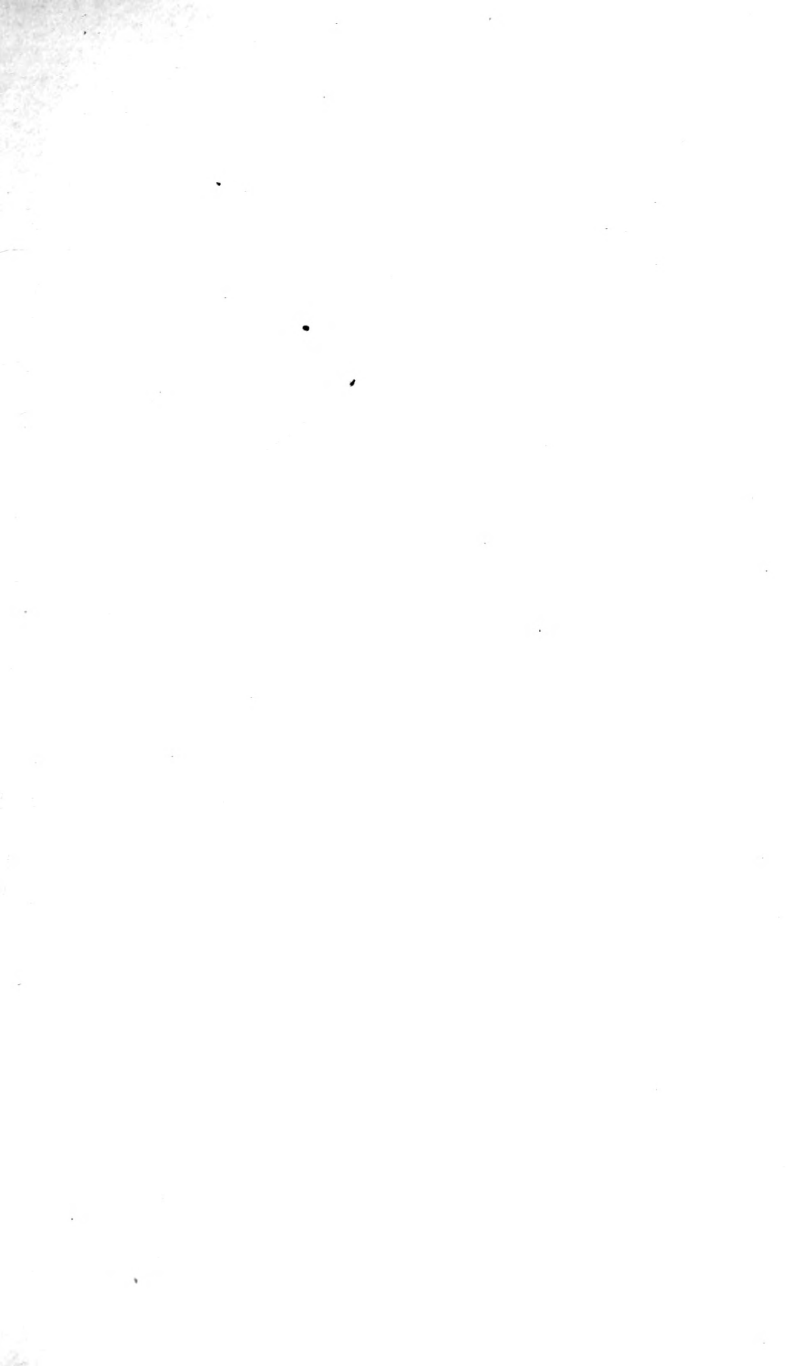
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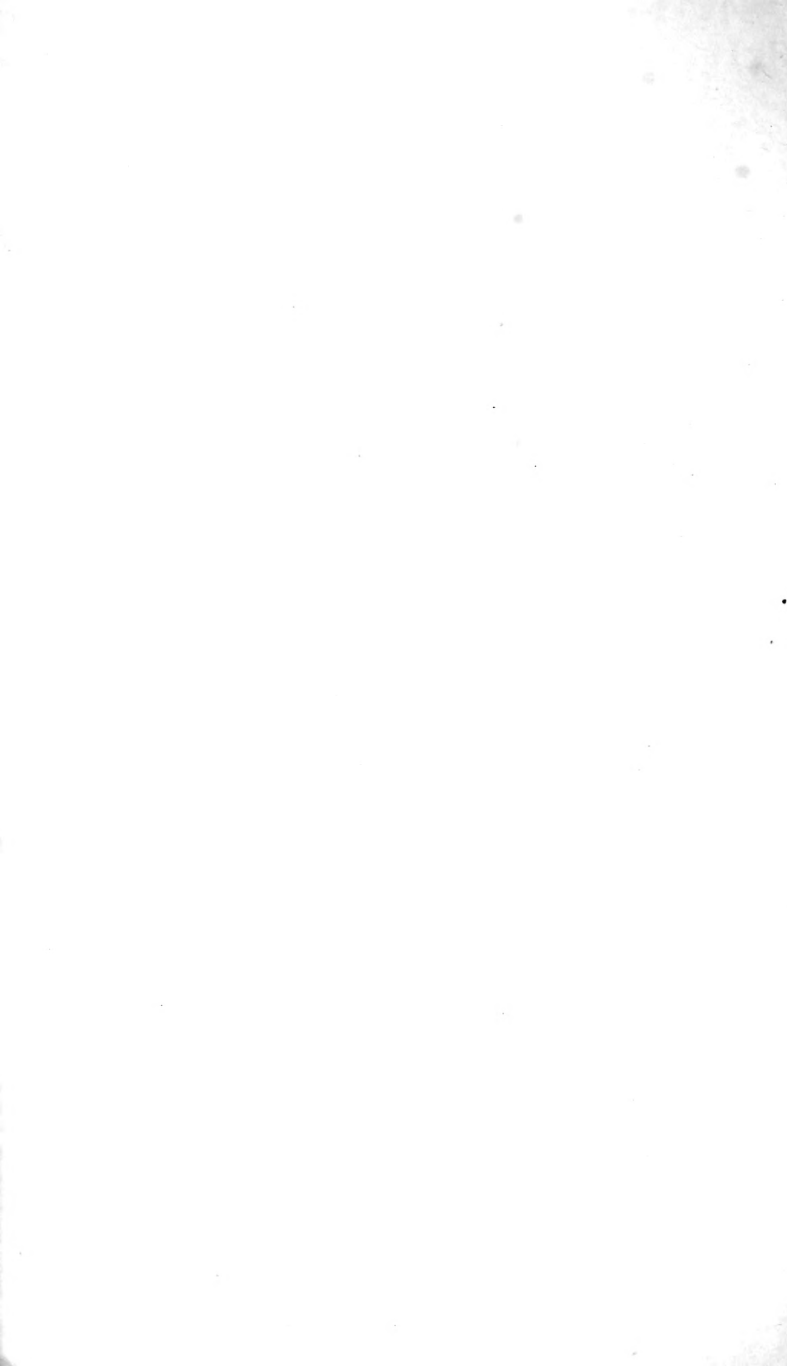
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# THE FATE:

A TALE OF STIRRING TIMES.

BY

G. P. R. JAMES, ESQ.,

AUTHOR OF "THE GIPSY," "THE FORGERY," "THE WOODMAN,"  
"THE OLD OAK CHEST," "HENRY SMEATON," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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# T H E F A T E .

## CHAPTER I.

IN the vast, immeasurable depths of thought there are so many resources, that one would suppose it were quite unnecessary for any man to repeat himself, or to copy others, let him write as much as he will ; and yet we see, continually, men of considerable powers of mind borrowing largely, I might even say systematically, from the works of others : not always the identical words, though sometimes those—not always the identical thought, though some-

times that ; but, more generally, the ideas suggested by the thoughts of others, and so intimately blended with them as to be inseparable ; judging themselves safe from the accusation of plagiarism upon the same plea which was put forth by a thief, indicted for stealing a scarf, who had proved he had only taken the gold fringe. I know many men who write much, and well ; but who seldom address themselves to literary composition, without having open around them many works of precisely the same character ; as that which they are composing. This is a dangerous habit, and much to be avoided. Indeed we pray against it every day, when we say, “Lead us not into temptation.”

As to repeating oneself, it is no very great crime, perhaps ; for I never heard that robbing Peter to pay Paul was punishable under any law or statute ; and the multitude of offenders in this sense, in all ages, and in all circumstances, is a palliation, if not an excuse, showing the frailty of human nature, and that we are

as frail as others, but no more. The cause of this self-repetition, probably, is—not a paucity of ideas—not an infertility of fancy—not a want of imagination or invention ; but that, like children sent daily to draw water from a stream, we get into a habit of dropping our buckets into that same immeasurable depth of thought, exactly at the same place ; and, though it be not exactly the water which we drew up the day before, it is very similar in quality and flavor—a little clearer, or a little more turbid, as the case may be.

Now this dissertation (which may be considered as an introduction, or preface, to my second volume) has been brought about—has had its rise, origin, source—in an anxious and careful endeavour to avoid, if possible, introducing in this work the two solitary horsemen—one upon a white horse—which, by some mode or another, have found their way into, probably, two out of three of all the books I have written ; and I need hardly tell the reader that

their name is legion. They are, perhaps, too many ; but, though *I* must die, some of them will live—I know it, I feel it ; and I must continue to write while this spirit is in this body.

To say truth, I do not know why I should wish to get rid of my two horsemen—especially the one on the white horse) Wouvermans always had a white horse in his pictures) ; and I do not see why I should not put my signature—my emblem—my monogram, in my paper-and-ink pictures, as well as any painter of them all. I am not sure that other authors do not do the same thing ; that Lytton has not always, or very nearly so, a philosophising libertine ; Dickens, a very charming young girl, with dear little pockets ; and Lever, a bold dragoon. Nevertheless, upon my life, if I can help it, we will not have in this work the two horsemen and the white horse, albeit, in after times, when my name is placed with Homer and Shakespeare—or in any other more likely posi-



tion—serious and acrimonious disputes may arise as to the real authorship of this book, from its wanting my own peculiar and distinctive mark and characteristic.

But, while writing about plagiarism, I have been myself a plagiarist ; and it shall not remain without acknowledgment, since I have suffered somewhat in that sort myself. Hear, my excellent friend, Leigh Hunt, soul of mild goodness, honest truth, and gentle brightness ! I acknowledge that I stole from you the defensive image of Wouvermans' white horse, which you incautiously put within my reach on one bright night of long, dreamy conversation, when our ideas which, in several things, wide as are the poles asunder, met suddenly without clashing, or produced but a cool, quiet spark, as the white stones which children rub together in dark corners, emit a soft phosphorescent gleam which serves but to light their little noses.

## CHAPTER II.

THE course of our narrative must now go back for the space of a few hours. Ralph Woodhall had calculated upon finding some opportunity, during the day, of quiet conversation with Margaret ; but he felt some trouble and anxiety, when desired, by his friend and patron, the Duke of Norfolk, to escort Lady Danvers upon her road westward. He knew not how to refuse, however ; for the Duke informed him that intimation had been received of tumults on the road, and the fair Hortensia herself was present, looking as beautiful as ever, but pale and considerably agitated, and

apparently alarmed. In such circumstances, there was no shewing even any hesitation ; and, turning to the lady, he said,

“If you will but wait for me five minutes, Lady Danvers, I will be ready. I wish to say a few words to my cousin, who must be up by this time, and—”

“Oh, there will be plenty of time for that after you return, Mr. Woodhall,” said the Duke. “Lord Woodhall announced, last night, his intention of remaining for to-morrow, or the next day. So sure was I of your prompt readiness, that I took the liberty of ordering your horse to be saddled, and he now stands at the door with five of my own servants, ready to accompany our fair friend’s carriage.”

This was said with stateliness, and Ralph evidently saw that something was unexplained.

“I will get my hat and gloves then,” he said, “and be ready to escort Lady Danvers at once.”

"I will send for them," returned the Duke; and, raising his voice, he called a servant, saying, "Minton, get Mr. Woodhall's hat and gloves."

Ralph smiled, but made no reply; and, as soon as the servant returned with what he had been sent for, he followed the Duke, who, with ancient courtesy, conducted the lady to her carriage, and kissed her fair hand as he placed her in it, whispering at the same time, "You see that I have obeyed your injunctions to the letter. But take care of your reputation, dear lady."

Hortensia blushed to the <sup>\*</sup>eyes, but answered gaily, "Never fear that, my Lord Duke. I do right, and defy scandal."

The carriage moved on, and Ralph Woodhall followed it, with the Duke of Norfolk's servants, and those of the fair Baroness, following him. Throughout the first five miles of the journey, poor Margaret might have seen him with relief and satisfaction to her own heart. Thoughtful and abstracted, he kept near the carriage, it

is true ; but he never, once approached its side. He rode on at the slow, uneasy pace which was necessary to keep up with, but not pass by, the heavy vehicle, with eyes turned towards the ground, and a somewhat contracted brow. He was not sullen, for his was a frank and cheerful heart ; and, though he was grieved to be deprived of Margaret's society even for a few hours, when he could have enjoyed it without peril to himself or her, that would never have clouded his bright look when he sacrificed it to be of service to another. But there appeared something strange to him in the whole of what had lately passed ; something that roused suspicion of a vague, unpleasant kind—that showed him he was made an instrument of, for some purpose which was carefully concealed from himself.

Could it be at the desire of Lord Woodhall that he was sent away ? he asked himself. Could his love for Margaret, or Margaret's love for him, have been dis-

covered? Perhaps it was; and the intention of the parties might be to send him away from the house upon some fair excuse, till she was removed.

The thought was very bitter to him; yet his mind clung to it, and the more he reflected, the more probable the supposition seemed. There were objections, it is true. That the Duke of Norfolk should have condescended to mingle himself with such a deceit, was not at all likely; and he could not imagine for one moment that Lady Danvers would have knowingly lent herself to it. All the opinions she had expressed the night before—her whole conduct—her whole manner—her very look—were opposed to it; and yet the anxiety to hurry him away, to prevent him from speaking with any of his relations, or even seeing them before he went, the few whispered words that passed between the Duke and Hortensia, which he had remarked, although he did not hear them distinctly, all seemed to tend to one con-

clusion, and puzzled him sorely. He revolved the whole in his mind, first turning the argument one way, and then another—at one time convinced, and at another doubting.

Thus he rode on pondering, as I have said, for some miles, when suddenly the sound of a horse's feet, coming rapidly behind, attracted his ear, and he turned and looked round. The servants of the Duke of Norfolk were in the way, so that he could not see who approached; but, the moment after, doubt was ended by his own man Gaunt Stilling riding up.

“What is the matter?” asked Ralph, as the servant drew close to his side. “Has anything gone amiss?”

“I heard you had gone away for the morning, sir,” replied the man, respectfully; “and, as you had left your riding sword and taken your small sword, and had forgotten your cloak, I made bold to ride after you with them.”

Ralph unfastened the dangling, inconvenient weapon he carried, gave it to

the man, and put on the other sword—a more serviceable one for horseback—which had been brought. Then, pausing for a moment, he suffered Stilling to strap the folded riding-cloak to the back of the saddle, without dismounting; and, seeing him linger, asked, “Is there anything more?”

Gaunt Stilling approached as close as he could, and spoke several sentences to his master in a whisper. Ralph turned, and put a question or two in the same tone, with an expression of some—but not great—surprise on his face. The man replied; and it was only the dumb show which the Duke of Norfolk’s servants witnessed. At length, Ralph said aloud, “I will certainly be back before nightfall, unless some very unexpected circumstance occur to render it impossible; but, at all events, before bed time.”

Gaunt Stilling took off his hat, gracefully enough, and rode away, directing his horse towards Norwich. After giving nearly half an hour more to deep meditation, apparently



not of the most pleasant character, Ralph rode up to the side of the carriage, and commenced what he would fain have made an easy conversation with its fair inmate.

While this little event occurred, and these thoughts and considerations passed in his mind, he had been himself the object of some interest and anxiety to Lady Danvers. She attributed, indeed, his thoughtful, gloomy mood, and his want of ordinary gallantry, to very different feelings from those which were really in his breast.

"He has received the challenge," she thought; "and is fearful he won't get back in time." Then, addressing the maid who sat opposite, she said, "Look out, and tell me what he is doing now."

"Just the same as before, my lady," replied the girl; "gazing down at his horse's neck as if he were counting the hairs in the mane—and gloomy enough he seems too."

"We must prevent him from escaping,

Alice," said her mistress ; " but I know not well how to detain him till it is too late for him to go back."

" Trust to chance, my lady," replied the waiting-woman. " It is a rare book, that chapter of accidents, if one knows how to read it rightly.—But I dare say the Duke has told his own people how to manage it. I saw him speaking with Master Wilson, the head groom, who goes with us. I should not wonder if the young gentleman's horse cast a shoe, or went dead lame, or something of that kind."

Lady Danvers smiled, observing,

" I will not trust to that, Alice. The Duke seemed more indifferent about the matter than I expected. He said, that boys would fight ; but that, to please me, he would stop this affair. I trust to his word as far as his ability goes, for he is a man of honour ; but I do not think he will be very active in the business."

" Oh, dear !" exclaimed the maid, " I should think, for my part, he would be glad enough to stop two handsomé young gen-

tle men from cutting each other's throats on his own ground. I do hate the sight of those swords ; and, if I were king, I would have them all taken away, and locked up against a time of war. But the Duke certainly cannot like such things."

Hortensia Danvers shook her head.

"Neither you nor I, Alice," she said, "can understand men's feelings about these affairs. We have a great objection to be cut or wounded, or hurt in any way ; and bloodshed is naturally horrible to us. But no man cares much about such things in his own case, and of course cannot be expected to care more in the case of others."

It was at this moment that Ralph rode up to the side of the carriage, saying, with an effort,

"The roads are bad, notwithstanding the fine weather ; but I fear we shall have rain, for there is much mist lying on the low ground."

"I do not think that is a sign of rain," remarked Lady Danvers ; "but I am no good judge of signs and seasons."

“Would that I were!” returned Ralph ;  
“for there are many that I do not understand.”

“I must not pretend to be interpreter, rejoined Lady Danvers, in a gay tone. “However, if you wish me to act the Sybil, propound your questions, and I will try. You must take the oracle for what it is worth, and remember, that such answers always read two ways. But would it not be better for you to give your horse to one of the men, and take a seat here beside me till we arrive at some point of danger, when of course my knight will mount on horseback and deliver me ?”

“With all my heart,” replied Ralph ;  
“then I can question the prophetess at ease.”

Thus saying, he ordered the coachman to stop, and dismounting, entered the carriage.

“You mentioned danger just now,” he said, as soon as they were going forward again. “Tell me, dear Lady Danvers; do you really think there is any danger ?”

“Undoubtedly,” replied Lady Danvers ;  
“both I and the Duke thought so, or you  
would not have been now with me.”

“But have you had any intelligence  
which should make you fear ?” asked Ralph.

“Distinct and certain,” answered the fair  
lady. “It is true, I am of a rather timid  
nature, and apt, perhaps, to be frightened  
sometimes without cause ; but such is not  
the case with His Grace of Norfolk, and he  
judged that my apprehensions were very  
reasonable.”

“May I ask where the danger lies, and  
in what it consists ?” enquired Ralph.

“Nay, I do not know that I can give  
you a consistent account of the whole mat-  
ter,” responded Hortensia, with a quiet  
smile ; “but we heard of much discord and  
quarrelling, and that there was likely to be  
a fight.”

“Indeed !” exclaimed Ralph, with an air  
so perfectly unconscious, that Lady Danvers  
began to doubt whether she had been mis-

led, or whether he was acting the hypocrite to perfection.

“Have *you* had no cause to suppose such things were likely to take place?” she asked.

“None whatever,” he replied. “I almost fancied, from the extremely pressing hurry in which I was despatched upon this pleasant task, that the Duke did not only desire to confer upon me the honour and happiness of escorting you, but wished also to get me out of the way for a time.”

Hortensia raised her beautiful eyes to his face, and fixed them there while she enquired,

“Do you know of any motive that he could have for such a proceeding?”

“I can fix upon none in particular, but have been puzzling myself to divine one,” answered Ralph ; but, at the same time, he coloured highly ; and Hortensia was satisfied.

A silence of some minutes ensued, and

then the lady, with all her quiet gaiety, resumed the conversation.

“I do think,” she said, “to use a housemaid’s mode of asseveration, that you are the most ungallant young man I ever met with. I don’t say discourteous, for your manner is fair enough, Master Ralph Woodhall ; but I do not believe that there is one man to be found in court, camp, or city, who would have gone about to discover any cause for his being sent on a journey with me, or who would not, if forced to take it, have sworn most devoutly on the Holy Evangelists, that it was the most blessed chance that ever befel him—whether he thought it or not, Ralph Woodhall ; you understand—whether he thought it or not.”

Ralph, feeling that he had in some degree failed in politeness, replied, “No one, dear lady, would have told you so more readily, and no one would have felt it more sincerely, than myself, upon any other day than this ; but I had, to-day,

something important to do, which rendered what would otherwise have been a true pleasure, the cause of some slight embarrassment.—But, you see, I am too straightforward to be courtly, even when I do my best.”

“I like you all the better for it,” replied Lady Danvers, frankly. “But now let us talk of something else. I dare say, and hope, that you will get back in plenty of time to do all you want to do, if it be right and proper. If it be not, I hope you won’t; for I am certainly not going to give you up, and send you back again sooner than I please, because you are cross at being taken away from Norwich. Be, therefore, exceedingly civil and amusing during the whole of the rest of the journey, in the hope that your chains may thereby be broken all the speedier.”

Ralph thought that her philosophy was good and exerted himself to cast off his feeling of disappointment, and to make himself as agreeable as possible for the rest



of the way. He succeeded very well, although, to speak the truth, he did so chiefly by the assistance of Hortensia, who put forth all her powers to amuse the hour.

Thus passed the time upon the long and weary way which lies between Norwich and the western part of the county. The road is not very picturesque, even now ; displaying but little beauty and little variety, except the beauty of exceedingly well-cultivated fields, and the variety of oxen and sheep, sportsmen and dogs. But culture could then hardly be said to have begun, and it was not a sporting season of the year. There was no inducement, therefore, for the lady and her companion to turn their eyes from the interior of the carriage ; and, to say sooth, if Ralph desired a lovely prospect, he could not have had one more beautiful than the face and form of her who sat beside him. He could not but feel, too, the fascination of her look and manner ; and her conversation, gay, light,

and playful as it was, had frequently running through it, like dark veins in clear white marble, a strain of melancholy which rendered it still more charming. It was like a blithesome bird that dips its wings for an instant in a cool stream, only to rise again refreshed and brightened.

As the coach proceeded slowly, for it was one of those large, lumbering, gilded vehicles, which we cannot imagine to have travelled at the rate of more than four miles an hour, five hours had been consumed ere the party reached the little town of —

Ralph was glad to see it, for he thought he should be there dismissed ; and yet he could not exclude feelings of regret at parting with that fair and charming woman—feelings which, could Margaret have seen them really as they were, could have given her neither pain nor offence.

It was now between two and three o'clock, and there was a good deal of gaiety and bustle in the town ; the streets crowded, waggons and market carts ob-

structing the way, and countrymen riding rough-looking horses, with their tails tied up to keep them out of the mud. With some difficulty, the carriage moved along the road, and Ralph remounted his horse, in order to give directions for clearing the way. They reached, at length, the inn-door, where the horses were to be fed, and to rest for an hour or two. Ralph handed Lady Danvers from the carriage, and was leading her through a little crowd, which had gathered before the inn, when he remarked that, although the appearance of such a vehicle in a remote place, might well attract attention, the eyes of the mob were principally turned in another direction, as if watching for some object coming down the street.

“Dear me, my lady, there is something going on!” ejaculated Mistress Alice, the waiting-maid. “What can it be about?”

Hortensia made no reply ; but quitting, Ralph’s arm upon the step, walked hastily

to the house, and then whispered to the maid—

“Send the Duke’s head groom to me at once.”

The landlord, in the meantime, was bowing low, and his good dame, with abundant keys, and more than one pincushion, by her side, was curtseying to the ground, ready to shew the beautiful lady to her chamber.

“What is the matter, without?” asked Lady Danvers. “The people seem a good deal excited.”

“Oh, it is nothing at all,” replied the landlady; “only a non-conformist gentleman, who has been examined by the magistrates. They are taking him away to the gaol, and the people do not like it. I should not wonder if there was to be a riot to-night; for the Whigs have the upper hand in this town, and they don’t bear patiently all that is going on.”

Hortensia turned, and looked through the

door-way into the street. She saw Ralph standing on the steps, and a crowd passing hurriedly on before him. The next instant, however, she beheld him spring forward, and heard him exclaim—

“Why do you strike the man, sir? You are exceeding your duty. He cannot go faster than he does.”

What was answered, she did not hear; and the steps of the inn were almost instantly covered with a multitude of people, who shut out from her sight what was passing beyond.

“Come up-stairs, my lady, come up-stairs,” cried the landlord. “They will make bad work of it.”

Hortensia followed as fast as the landlord could go; and, being shewn into a large and handsome room which faced the street, she ran forward, threw open the window, and looked out. The sign-board of the inn was in the way, so that she could not see the exact spot

where Ralph stood ; but she heard angry words and fierce tones going on below, and, a moment after, stones began to fly, and cudgels to wave. But the next instant, the sound of Ralph's voice rose up over the din, exclaiming, clear and loud—

“ Keep the peace—keep the peace ! Suffer the constables to do their duty according to law ; and you, sirs, take care that you do not exceed the law, as you have done already by striking this gentleman when he was making no resistance.”

Though he spoke loud, his tone was so composed, and his words so reasonable, that Lady Danvers entertained no apprehension regarding his conduct or his safety ; and, taking one glance over the crowd, to a spot where she saw her maid standing on the opposite side of the road, afraid to make her way back to the inn, the lady withdrew into the room to avoid the stones, which were flying thicker than was pleasant.

The loud and angry speaking continued for several minutes, and a stone entered the room where Hortensia was sitting ; but no one came near her, for the excitement of the scene without had affected even the people of the inn, and it is probable that neither her own servants, nor those of the Duke of Norfolk, could force their way up to the door.

At length, however, a nimble step was heard upon the stairs, and the head groom, whom she had sent for, appeared with an eager and excited countenance. He doffed his hat as he entered the room, saying at once, " They have taken him before the magistrates, my lady ; but Mistress Alice said you wanted me."

" Who, who has been taken ?" demanded Lady Danvers. " Of whom do you speak ?"

" Mr. Ralph, my lady," replied the man. " We would have rescued him with a strong hand, and beaten the constables all to mortar ; but he would not let us, and ordered us all to keep the peace. I

had better run up at once with the rest, to see that he is fairly dealt by."

"Ay, do so, do so," cried Hortensia, eagerly; but then immediately she fell into a fit of thought, and, as the man was quitting the room, called him back, saying, "Stay—Wilton—Wilton. We may turn this to advantage, perhaps."

The man seemed surprised and confounded; but the lady beckoned him to come nearer, saying, "I have no time for explanations, Master Wilton; but you must do what you can, without endangering Mr. Woodhall's safety or character, to turn this matter so as to keep him here till to-morrow morning. In a word, the Duke of Norfolk sent him here with me to keep him out of the way. There was some quarrel going on between him and another gentleman in the house, and his Grace wished for time to arrange it before he returned."

"I understand, my lady, I understand," replied the man, with a shrewd nod of the



head. "His Grace gave me a little hint; but I did not think of turning this to profit. I'll manage it—I'll manage it." And away he went at full speed, saying to himself, "My lady does not mind having a handsome young man to sit with her all the evening, I'll warrant; though they do say she has refused scores of great people already. Well, there's no knowing woman-kind."

He overtook Ralph, walking quietly up the street between two constables, who, from an intimation of his strength which they had received, kept at a respectful distance from him. A number of men and boys were following closely; and all the servants of the Duke of Norfolk who had come into the town with the carriage, as well as several of Lady Danvers's, together with sundry women and children, brought up the rear. Wilton made his way through all these, and kept close to Ralph's elbow, till the party reached the Justice room, (which

was in fact the parlour of an ale-house) and the prisoner was ushered into the presence of the three justices, who, booted and spurred, and with their horsewhips in their hands, were just ready to leave the place and ride away. Two of them looked exceedingly rueful at the prospect of more business. The third, however, rapping out a great oath, cast himself back into his seat again, and laid his horsewhip on the table.

“Why, what the devil !” he said ; “you look like a gentleman, sir. Curse my buttons ! what have they brought you here for ?”

“They can best tell you themselves, sir,” answered Ralph.

“Don’t you go to church ? don’t you take the sacrament ? Are you a non-conformist ?”

“I go to church and take the sacrament as regularly as most men,” replied Ralph ; “and non-conformist I am none, having been brought up in the Church of England from my infancy.”

“Plague take you then !” exclaimed the choleric fat justice, addressing the constables ; “ what did you bring this gentleman here for ?”

The charge was formally made by the two constables, imputing to Ralph the serious offences of riot and an attempt to rescue a prisoner.

Ralph, in reply, simply told his own story. The constables, he said, had treated an old and respectable looking man with unjustifiable harshness, irritated apparently by the great crowd which had collected. One of them had even struck him with his staff, upon the pretence of making him go on, although he was offering no resistance.

“That was Doggett, I’ll be sworn,” said the magistrate, looking round at his two brethren. “I told you all, Doggett would get us into a scrape some day.”

Doggett, however, was not present, having gone to lodge his prisoner in gaol for re-examination ; and the magistrate, turning again to Ralph Woodhall, said,

“ Well sir ; but who are you ? What’s your station, rank, profession ? What do you know of this prisoner who you say was maltreated.”

“ I know nothing of him whatever,” replied Ralph, “ except that he was maltreated, and that I told the man who struck him that he exceeded his duty. As to my name, rank, station, et cetera—my name is Ralph Woodhall, a distant relation of a nobleman of that name, without any rank but that of a Master of Arts, without any condition which can particularly designate me, but that of being at present a guest of the Duke of Norfolk, and having undertaken, at his request, to escort Lady Danvers on a part of her way west.”

The magistrates all looked very blank, for the Duke of Norfolk was the great man in those parts, and great men, whether good men or not, obtained much more deference in those days than at present.

The business would have probably ended in a dismissal of the charge, and a rebuke

to the constables; but Master Wilton, a shrewd native of Yorkshire, from which county the principal grooms in great families were then generally selected, chose his moment well, and, stepping forward, observed,

“What Master Woodhall says, your worships, is quite true, and I could prove it, if I had time to bring forward my witnesses. I am head groom to his Grace of Norfolk, who is the dearest friend of this young gentleman. If your worships like to put off the case until I can get the people who saw it all, I will be ’sponsible that Mr. Ralph will be here at any time you like to-morrow.”

The magistrates looked wise ; but Ralph exclaimed, with a somewhat sharp gesticulation of impatience, “I would a great deal rather that the case was decided at once. I have business which calls me back to Norwich.”

“This is a very serious charge, sir,” said one of the magistrates who had not yet

spoken — an ill-tempered man, rendered cross by having been detained. “Recollect, sir, that, if we decide against you on a charge of riot and attempt to rescue, we shall have to commit you to prison for trial.”

“*I* have plenty of witnesses, too, if they talk of witnesses,” said one of the constables, “who can prove that there was a riot, and that he had a hand in it. I suppose his being a friend of the Duke of Norfolk is no great matter here.”

This period of the discussion was the most unpleasant part to Ralph Woodhall. The prospect of being committed to prison, if he pressed the case forward at that moment, was of course more unpleasant to him than that of being detained for the whole day ; nevertheless he urged, in a few words, that the witnesses might be speedily collected, as they could not be far off, and that the Duke expected his return that night.

“That cannot be of the slightest con-

sequence to us, sir," said the chairman of the magistrates, with solemn dignity of manner ; "and we cannot wait here all the evening, collecting witnesses. We might perhaps defer the hearing till to-morrow morning ; and in the meantime should be sorry to do any thing harsh, if we could be quite certain that you will be here present at the precise hour appointed."

"I'll pawn my body and soul, your worship," said Wilton, "that he does not stir out of the town to-night ; and if he do, you can come and take my horse out of the Duke's stables, and lose me my wages and my place."

"Will you give your word of honour, sir," asked the magistrate, addressing Ralph, "that you will appear at the hour appointed ?"

There seemed no help for it, and Ralph replied, "I will, if the hour be an early one."

“Nine o’clock,” answered the magistrate, with a laugh, “we are all early men. I hold you to your word then ; and you, too, Master What’s your name.—Clerk, make out a bail bond for him, we won’t be too particular as to the property.”

Once more there was no help for it ; and it is good policy in life, as Ralph well knew, to submit patiently to that for which there is no help. The clerk, however, was tediously slow ;—people always are slow when we want them to be quick ; and, by the time the whole business was concluded, and Ralph once more issued forth into the air, the clock in the old steeple was striking five.

A little crowd had gathered about the doors of the Justice room, and they greeted Ralph, when he appeared at liberty, with a warm-hearted cheer. He got clear of the people as soon as he could, however, and, followed by the servants of the Duke of Norfolk and Lady Danvers, made his way back to the Inn.



A day from which he had expected some of those golden moments which are the treasures of the heart, had now nearly passed by, without affording him one look of her he loved.

## CHAPTER III.

How often, as society is constituted, does the passing of one single hour affect the whole of the hours that gather into life! A moment is sometimes enough; but it is more frequently an hour—two hours—an evening.

I wonder if it was so with the patriarchs. I rather think not; for, if so, they would not have lived so long. If Methuselah had gone on at the railroad pace, at which we live in modern days—if he had crowded into each day of life, the same amount of thought, sensation, act, event, which now fills up the space of every four and twenty hours, between seventeen and

seventy, the whole history of the world, in its hundred thousand folio tomes, would have been a joke to the annals of his existence. But we make a great mistake if we think that those old gentlemen, in anything, lived as fast as we do ; and this, I feel sure, was the secret of their longevity.

Oh no ! they moved from place to place, with their flocks and herds, travelling not much more than five or six miles a day. They struck their tents in the morning ; they pitched them in the evening. They milked their cows, tended their “ much cattle ;” and the day was done. Sometimes they did not even strike their tents at all ; but remained upon one spot, till, like the locusts, they had eaten up every green thing. An occasional combat with a lion or a bear—a fight with a neighbouring herdsman, or the procuration of venison, to make savory meat —were events agreeably diversifying the monotony of existence ; and I have a strong notion that thought

and feeling marched at as slow a rate as all the rest.

Thus was it, probably, that their thoughts were so grand—their feelings so powerful. In mighty masses they moved slow ; but whatever they touched, they overwhelmed.

We, on the contrary, can never go too fast ; forgetting that only a certain portion of life is allotted to every man, and that life is not mere time, measured by suns or moons, but a certain amount of action, event, idea, sensation. We crowd more into seven days than a patriarch put into seven years ; and then we wonder that life is so brief, and that so little time has been allowed us.

An evening—a long evening—was before Ralph Woodhall and Hortensia Danvers. What might they not have accomplished in that space of time ? How completely, under many circumstances, might it have altered the whole course of the fate of both !—and it did affect their fate considerably ; perhaps not in event, perhaps

not in that course and conduct of external life which is open to the eye of the world, which consists of act, and influences others ; but much in that internal life, where thought and feeling are the actors, where spirit speaks to spirit, and their proceedings are only open to the eye of consciousness.

But let me tell—and as briefly as possible ; for I must hurry on to other things—what did actually take place.

When Ralph returned to the inn, he was led at once by the landlord, with every demonstration of the most profound respect, to the apartments which had been assigned to Lady Danvers. He found one of the servants of the Duke of Norfolk with her ; one of her own men, and her own waiting-woman ; and he saw, at a glance, by the sparkling look with which she gave him her hand, that she had heard all, and had approved what he had done. He was rather surprised indeed, to see, the state and condition of the room into which he was shown. It had been understood

that Lady Danvers was to go on that night, as soon as her horses should be refreshed ; but now, everything seemed prepared for her longer stay.

Hortensia had an art of giving any place, even of temporary abode an air of graceful refinement, which was very charming ; and it was done with a rapidity and precision which could only be accomplished by the aid of the fairy of order. The room was a large, old-fashioned, dingy room, well furnished enough, and reserved for persons of high degree who might chance occasionally to visit the house ; but since Hortensia Danvers entered it, the furniture had been re-arranged, and a number of articles of taste and ornament had been taken by the maid from her baggage, and laid about upon the tables, with, apparently, a careless care. Here was seen the book of Common Prayer, in its cover of crimson velvet, with silver clasps ; there, a beautifully finished miniature in a golden frame. In other places, materials for

writing were arranged in quaintly formed stands of the workmanship of the fifteenth century; while all the flowers that could be procured in the neighbourhood, decorated different parts of the room. The maid was still busy with these arrangements, under her lady's direction, when Ralph entered, and gazed round with a look of wonder.

His fair, young companion seemed to enjoy his surprise, and ejaculated, in a cheerful tone, "Have I not decorated the room gaily?"

"You have indeed, sweet lady," he answered; "but is not all this labour thrown away? I thought you were going forward this evening."

"So thought I," returned Lady Danvers, "till you chose to get yourself apprehended by constables, Mr. Woodhall. Then, as you had courteously come so far to take care of me, I found myself bound in courtesy to stay, to take care of you. You would not have had me go on, and leave you in the hands of the Philistines, surely?"

I have just heard how it has all ended for the time ; but, over and above a wish to know how the matter goes with you to-morrow, it is too late now, at half past five, to think of moving my quarters for the night. I therefore invite you to sup here, and to spend such portion of your time with me, in this dull solitude, as you can withdraw from more weighty occupations."

She spoke in a gay and jesting tone ; and, seeing a certain look of uneasiness upon Ralph's countenance, which she justly attributed to the thought of being detained—though she misunderstood entirely the circumstances which rendered the detention painful—she added, "Moreover, I lay my commands upon you to clear your countenance instantly—to submit with a good grace to the will of fate—to cast off all thought of repining at being cooped up for a whole evening with Hortensia Danvers, and, if possible, to make yourself exceedingly agreeable, and more civil than



ordinary. Alice, you stay here," she continued, addressing the waiting maid, who seemed about to quit the room ; and then, with a laughing look to Ralph, she added, " It is as well that she should have the benefit of our learned conversation, both for her own instruction, and the instruction of others."

Ralph could not help smiling ; and, seating himself beside her in one of the window-seats, he made up his mind to do as she bade him, to think no more of what could not be avoided, and to make the present pass as agreeably as might be.

The scene before them was not very romantic : a wide old street, with the quaint gables of the houses turned to the highway ; edifices of wood, with galleries and sometimes stair-cases running over the outside, and buildings of stone and brick—for the country afforded both. There was the market-cross in the middle of the highway, where the road grew wide, about twenty yards above

the inn door, enlarging into a sort of market square ; and the church tower, a hundred yards beyond, with a group of boys playing at marbles before the gate by which the dead were borne into the cemetery, and wrangling over their game as fiercely as if they had tasted human blood. Some knots of people still lingered in the streets, gossiping sagely over the events which had just passed, and presaging still more sagely the events which were to come ; and numerous carts and waggons, with their loads still packed or ready for removal, occupied a considerable portion of the street. It was like a dream of the age that was fading away, ready to give place to a period fresher, stiffer, more practical.

Over the whole, hung a light, misty haze of sunshine and vapour commingled, not uncommon on an English afternoon, nor unlike the dim, magnifying fog which shrouds from the eager eye the transition from the present to the future.

“ How richly the sunshine streams down

the street upon that old carved cross and the straw-strewn market-place!" exclaimed Ralph.

"All the more bright because we see not whence it comes," replied Hortensia; "and the warmer—to the eye at least—for passing through an atmosphere grosser than that from which it issues. What is it most like, Ralph?—woman's love—or heaven's bounty—or the rays of Hope that stream between the close dwellings of man's earthly aspirations, gilding the straws upon his onward way, and making the stones on his path shine like jewels?"

"Like woman's love, methinks," rejoined Ralph; "because, as you say, it pours from sources we do not see, brightens the dimmer air that it pervades, and often lends a lustre to worthless objects which shine in its light alone."

"True," returned the lady, with a sigh. "But see! it catches the cross upon the steeple top, and makes it shine as if with fire."

“It will rest there longest,” remarked her companion, “shining after all is dark below.”

“Even so,” said the lady, retiring from the window. “I love the shaded light of a quiet room better than the wide garish sunshine abroad. Come, let us talk of other days, when you and I were boy and girl, and knew not of each other’s being ; and chased butterflies, and sought to catch the rainbow, and did all that the common bond of nature uses, to link withal the human hearts through the wide world in one community of universal sympathy in early years. Tell me, Ralph Woodhall: why is it that all mankind, thus one in happy youth, should part so widely in mature years—part, in feeling and in thought, in conduct and in course, in object, and in means ?”

“Because,” replied Ralph —“at least, so I suppose—infancy is one general starting point from which all the roads of life

diverge, leading farther and farther asunder."

"Till they guide us to the great precipice which surrounds our arena on every side," added the lady, "and we take the leap from points wide apart. But we are getting dull, Mr. Woodhall. Do you remember your mother?"

"But faintly," replied Ralph, "yet brightly too, though it may seem a contradiction. The retrospect through life is, to me, like the prospect down that street, where there are many long shadowy spaces in which I can see nothing clearly, while every here and there comes a bright gleam of light, displaying everything as vividly as in mid-day."

"Memory—memory !" exclaimed the lady ; "it is ever like the setting sun."

"Sometimes," continued Ralph, "the objects farthest off seem to catch the light of that sun of memory most brightly ; and where a dark lapse of shadow intervenes, the objects beyond are the most brilliant,

One of my earliest recollections is of having been taken into a large room dimly lighted by a shaded lamp, and seeing a pale, beautiful face pillowed on my father's arm. I remember being lifted up by a nurse upon the side of the bed, and my father raising gently my mother's drooping frame while she cast her arms around me ; and I heard her say ' God bless and keep thee, my child ! ' Then some tears fell upon my face, and I was carried away. All around that scene is dark and obscure ; but the scene itself is as clear to memory as the events of yesterday."

" It may be that such is the happiest parting," said Lady Danvers, shading her eyes with her hand. " It is very sad to watch the decreasing strength, to gaze anxiously upon the waning colour, to listen terrified to the panting breath, to see the eyes we love lose their light, and to mark the dull awful change steal over the face once warm and eager with affection. Yet who can tell ? Each one has his sorrow. Nature's

lamp is only lighted to go out, and leave the heart it cheered in darkness. What matters it, if it be suddenly extinguished by some harsh wind, or slowly flicker out from failing oil? Come, let us be more cheerful; let us talk of the gay, great world—or of country scenes and happy life at home. Surely we may find some themes more cheering than death or sunset.”

“Both have a morrow;” replied Ralph. And then he tried with some success to vary the conversation with lighter topics; Still, the sombre hue, which the discourse had at first assumed, spread through it all a quiet, gentle melancholy, which was not without its danger to one heart there.

Ralph had but little knowledge of the world—none of court or courtly scenes. By nature—by habit, by thought, by feeling—he was a gentleman. His collegiate life had not been long enough to stiffen or to harden him, and his studies had been directed

to all those acquirements which embellish, as well as enrich, the mind. Thus his conversation was new—almost strange—to Hortensia's ears ; unlike aught she had heard before, yet full of sympathies with much in her own heart and mind ; and for several hours the time passed sweetly, till, towards half-past eight, Ralph rose to retire.

“Surely,” she thought, “all danger of an angry meeting must have gone by for to-day.”

And, perhaps with too strong a consciousness that she would willingly have detained him longer, she let him go.

Shortly after, an indefinable feeling of dread took possession of her. “There is no knowing,” she thought, “what men, in their intemperate courage, may do, to satisfy themselves upon their point of honor. Alice,” she continued aloud, “go and see for Mr. Ralph Woodhall ; tell him I want him—that I have forgotten something, which I wish to say.”



“Lord, my lady, I dare say he is gone to bed,” replied the girl.

“Ascertain, at all events,” said Lady Danvers. “Ask one of the Duke’s servants.”

The waiting-woman left the room, and remained away about five minutes. When she returned, she said, with a laugh, unconscious of her mistress’s anxiety, “The young gentleman has gone forth, my Lady—to amuse himself in the town, I’ll warrant; but Master Wilton says he will give him your Ladyship’s message, as soon as he returns.”

Lady Danvers sat up more than an hour, but Ralph did not make his appearance. At length, with a heavy heart, she retired to rest.

## CHAPTER IV

“It is hopeless!” ejaculated the Duke of Norfolk, sadly, as he stood by the side of the bed, on which they had laid the body of Henry Woodhall, and let the cold hand, which he had taken in his own, sink slowly down by the dead man’s side.

“Quite hopeless, I fear your Grace,” replied a surgeon, who stood on the other side. “The sword, I suspect, has passed right through his heart.”

“Did not some one say that Mr. Robert Woodhall is still in the house?” enquired the Duke. “Why is he not here? Has any one told him?”

“He knows it, your Grace,” answered one of his servants, who had aided to bear in the body ; “his own servant went up to inform him.—I saw him pass that way, in haste.”

“Has any one seen Mr. Ralph Woodhall ?” enquired the Duke ; but no one replied, and he sent up to Ralph’s room, to ascertain if he had returned.

In a moment or two, the messenger appeared again, saying. “He is not there, your Grace. His servant says, that he went away this morning with Lady Danvers, and has not yet returned.”

The Duke mused, and then made enquiries as to whether the wilderness, and the grounds adjacent, had been searched, observing at the same time,

“This poor youth has evidently fallen in a duel, for, when he went away this morning, he concealed his intention of coming back. Nevertheless, it is right we should know his opponent, that we may ascertain if the

circumstances of the combat were all fair."

"The poor young gentleman's servant is below, your Grace," said the chamberlain; "but I would not let him come up till I had your commands."

"Bring him here, bring him here at once," said the Duke; "perhaps he can throw some light on this sad affair."

The man was immediately brought into the room—a tall, stout, fresh-coloured, good-looking fellow; but he turned ashy pale, when his eye fell upon the breathless form of his master; and, without noticing any one in the room, he advanced to the bedside, while the tears rose thickly in his eyes, exclaiming—

"Alas, alas, poor Master Henry! a better gentleman did not live. Little did I think, when you told me to give the letter early to-morrow, what you were going to do to-night, or I would have stopped it one way or another. But your father will

have vengeance on him who killed you, if it costs him his heart's blood ; or I don't know him."

"Of what letter do you speak, my good friend?" asked the Duke. "Is it one from this poor young gentleman to his father?"

"No, your Grace," replied the man, drawing forth a letter from his pocket, but, apparently, hesitating as to whether he should deliver it. "I am to give it to your Grace to-morrow."

"Give it to me now," said the Duke, in a tone of authority. "No time like the present."

And, taking the letter, he opened it at once. The contents were as follows :—

"MY LORD DUKE,

"A quarrel having taken place, between myself and my cousin, Mr. Ralph Woodhall, which we are to void to-night, in the manner which befits gentlemen of

our station—and as the issue of such encounters is always uncertain—I write you these few lines, in case matters should go unfavourably with myself. Although I think he has behaved ill, in some affairs of domestic concern, and has certainly caused great pain and uneasiness in my family, for which I have demanded satisfaction this night, I hold Ralph to be a man of honour, and I beg to inform you, that the challenge was given by myself, in such terms that he could not refuse to accept it; that I appointed the meeting to take place by moonlight, in order to avoid the eyes which, I had reason to believe, were upon us, and that it was my express desire that no witnesses or seconds should be present. I say this, lest, from the above circumstances, some undeserved imputation should fall upon the character of my cousin. From my knowledge of him during many years, I am able to assure you, whatever is the result, that all will have passed

honorably and fairly between us ; and, so long as I have life, I beg you, my Lord Duke, to believe me.

“ Your Grace’s most faithful

“ And obedient servant,

“ HENRY WOODHALL.”

The Duke mused much over this letter ; and hesitated, in some degree, how he should act. He doubted not, from the warm and impetuous temper of Lord Woodhall, that the servant’s words would prove prophetic, and that the old nobleman, would suffer nothing to stand in the way of his vengeance.

“ I must have time for thought,” he said to himself. “ This youth, Ralph, has given his fair guardian the slip, it seems. Well. I cannot blame him ; I should most likely have done the same myself, in his circumstances. He should have staid, however, to confront what he has done—and yet,

perhaps not. It is better as it is. His presence would have been very embarrassing."

As he thus thought, with his eyes fixed upon the door, Robert Woodhall suddenly entered the room ; and the Duke, though not a very acute man, could not help remarking that a sudden change came upon the young man's countenance, even as he passed the threshold. The expression of his face, at the moment he pushed the door open, was anything but one of dissatisfaction ; there was even a faint smile upon his lip, although his visage was pale enough. But a look of deep sadness was assumed in a moment ; and, advancing to his noble host, he first apologised, in good set form, for not having come sooner, alleging that he was partly undressed when the news arrived ; which, as the reader knows, was false.

The Duke replied by pointing to the corpse, and, saying, somewhat stiffly,

"This is a sad sight, sir ! I hope you



have had no share in urging this quarrel forward ; and I think it might have been better, had you taken means to prevent its fatal termination. By good advice, such matters are sometimes obviated."

"Ah, poor Henry!" cried Robert, with one look at the dead body, and a shudder, which was natural enough. "I do assure your Grace, that I had nothing to do with this squabble at all. Henry wrote the challenge with his own hand ; I did not even bear it to my cousin Ralph ; and surely a man of honour, like yourself, would not have me betray a secret, intrusted in full confidence to my keeping."

"And yet," said the Duke, sternly, "at the very moment when your two near relations were about to shed each other's blood, you were undressing to go to bed."

Robert coloured, whether he would or not ; but he excused himself by another lie.

"I did not know the precise hour, my Lord Duke," he answered. "Henry only

gave me half his confidence. He would not even leave a letter, which he wrote to your Grace, to my care. He acted in everything for himself."

"Perhaps he did rightly," replied the Duke, with something of bitterness; for there was that in the young man's conduct and demeanour which did not please him—nay, which excited suspicions; just in themselves, though not very definite.

"I think it will be better, Mr. Woodhall, he continued, "for you to mount on horseback, as early as may be to-morrow morning, and break the tidings of this unfortunate affair to poor Lord Woodhall."

"I will go at once, my Lord Duke," replied Robert.

"That is needless," replied the Duke, in a grave, melancholy tone; "you would but break in upon his rest. Do not rob an aged man of one night of calm repose that he can enjoy. Do not add more hours of bitterness to the many bitter hours he must endure. I will write to him myself,

by your hands, and you shall have the letter by the gray of the dawn to-morrow. That will be time enough."

"But will your Grace take no means to cause the apprehension of the murderer?" demanded Robert Woodhall, with a look of well-assumed surprise.

"Murderer!" echoed the Duke. "Do you mean your cousin, sir?"

"He *was* my cousin, sir," replied Robert, a good deal nettled by the Duke's tone; "but I shall regard him as my cousin no longer. A man who drives another, by his bad conduct, to call him to the field, and then slays him, I can but look upon as a murderer, be he my cousin or not."

"That dead hand there," said the Duke, pointing to the corpse, "wrote, while yet in life, a full exculpation of his adversary's conduct; in the affair of the duel, at least. Ralph Woodhall was only acting, it would seem, as any man of honour would have acted; and those who best deserve the

name of murderers, are they who urge on petty quarrels to a fatal result."

"Your Grace's opinion seems harsh of me," said Robert Woodhall, with feelings of rage he could hardly repress.

"I have not forgotten," replied the Duke of Norfolk, "that the first quarrel, last night, was between yourself and your cousin Ralph. What may have been your conduct since, I do not pretend to say ; but certain I am, that, until Henry Woodhall quitted the supper table, he and his cousin were upon the most friendly terms, and I am not aware that they met afterwards, till this last fatal occasion."

Thus saying, he turned and left the room ; giving some necessary directions to his servants as he descended the stairs.

Robert Woodhall remained standing at the foot of the bed, with his eyes gloomily fixed on the floor. Several of the attendants still continued in the room ; but they all drew back from the young

man with a feeling of dislike and suspicion, for which they might have found it difficult to assign a cause, though, undoubtedly, the Duke's words gave direction to their thoughts. There are instincts, however, in the human breast, and those instincts, probably, had some share in the feelings of the men who surrounded Robert Woodhall.

He remained there, I have said, with his eyes fixed gloomily on the floor—not on the corpse. But he was roused from his reverie by the voice of the surgeon, who still stood by the bed-side, and who said, “Mr. Woodhall, will you come here for a moment?”

Robert approached him slowly, and then the old man said, in a peculiar tone, “Will you put your hand upon the breast of your poor cousin?”

“No!” cried Robert Woodhall, almost fiercely; and, turning sharply on his heel, he quitted the room.

About two hours after the events I have

just related, the Duke of Norfolk was seated in his fine library, with lights and papers before him, but quite alone. The door opened, and his chamberlain appeared, saying, "Here is Mr. Ralph's man, your Grace ; he had not yet gone to bed."

The chamberlain had been followed into the room by Gaunt Stilling, whose large massive brow was very heavy, as if with deep grief. The Duke waved his hand to the chamberlain, and that officer withdrew to the other side of the door, keeping watch there, but not approaching too close.

"Your master has not returned yet, I hear," said the Duke, fixing his eyes upon Stilling's face.

"He has not, my lord Duke," replied the other, gravely.

"This is a bad affair," said the Duke, "and I fear that the consequences may be very serious to your master. Lord Woodhall is a man of much influence at Court, and of a warm and vehement temper. This

gentleman who has been killed was the general favourite."

"And well he deserved to be so!" cried Gaunt Stilling, warmly. "He was not perfect; no man is; but, as people of his rank go, there were few like him. Had it been his cousin Robert, who would have cared? but Fate seems to make mistakes, sometimes, as well as others. The good are taken, and the bad are left."

The Duke listened quietly to this outburst of feeling, and then enquired if the man thought he could tell where his master was to be found.

"I think I can find him, your Grace," replied Gaunt Stilling; "but I will not say *where*, lest any evil should come of it."

"I do not wish to know where," answered the Duke of Norfolk. "If you can find him, well. Bear him this letter from me; and it will be as well to take with you as much of his baggage as you can, for I think it will be inexpedient for him to return hither for some time, when

this storm may have blown by. I will find means to befriend him during his absence."

"What am I to do with the rest of the baggage, my Lord Duke?" asked Gaunt Stilling. "There is a great deal more than a horse-load."

"A carrier will be crossing the country, I think, to-morrow," the Duke replied. "The chamberlain will give you surer information. You can send the superfluous baggage by him, to any place you like, northward or westward—perhaps it would be better to send it to his father's house. But my people will see it expedited, if you give it into their charge."

Gaunt Stilling bowed, took the packet which the Duke held in his hand, and which deserved that epithet, rather than the name of letter, and withdrew in silence. But he did not set out immediately. An hour was spent in packing up the baggage of his master, and another hour in writing a long letter, which, when finished and sealed, he placed in another half sheet of



paper, on the inner side of which he wrote a few lines to his own father, and put old Stilling's address, at Coldenham, upon the whole. This, together with the larger trunk-mails, he delivered to the Duke's night-porter, to be forwarded by the chamberlain on the following day; and then, after making some enquiries as to the shortest roads, he placed the two pair of saddle-bags upon his horse, and set out in the same direction which had been taken by his master and Lady Danvers on the preceding morning.

It was by this time nearly four o'clock; and, until daylight, Stilling rode as fast as he could go, except where, every now and then, he met with a corner or a turning of which he did not feel very sure. When daylight broke, and the labourers began to trudge forth into the fields, he found that he had gone somewhat out of his way, which obliged him to re-trace his steps nearly a couple of miles. He then proceeded more cautiously, but contrived to

reach the little town where Lady Danvers was, a few minutes before nine. At the inn he asked eagerly for his master, having some fear, indeed, that Ralph might have passed him, while he had been wandering wide of the proper track.

The reply, however, satisfied him ; for the landlord stated that the young gentleman, Mr. Woodhall, had that moment gone down to the Justice-room, with all the Duke of Norfolk's servants. Thither Stilling followed him, as soon as he had given his horse into the hands of the ostler and placed his bags in security. Round the door, a small crowd had collected, as usual ; but the stout young fellow elbowed his way in, and arrived just at the moment when the fat magistrate in the chair was announcing the decision of the bench.

“ There is no pretence whatsoever,” said the Justice—“ at least, such is the opinion of myself and my brethren—for detaining Mr. Ralph Woodhall, even for an hour. It

is clearly shown, by a multitude of witnesses, that he endeavoured to calm the riot, rather than to excite it ; and that the brutal conduct of the constable, Doggett, was the sole cause of any commotion ; for which brutal conduct, we have determined to reprimand the said Doggett, and he is reprimanded accordingly. Mr. Woodhall, you are at liberty ; and we hope that your detention may not prove inconvenient."

Ralph was about to make some reply, but Stilling, stepping forward, placed the packet in his hand, saying, " From his Grace of Norfolk, sir—in haste."

Ralph took it, and was breaking the seal, when Gaunt Stilling whispered, " You had better read it in private, sir, for there is matter of much moment in it."

Hurrying out of the Justice-room, Ralph returned to the inn, sought his own chamber, and opened the packet.

It contained several sealed letters, addressed to different gentlemen in Dorset-

shire and Somersetshire, and for himself a brief note, to the following effect :

“ MY YOUNG FRIEND,

“ After finishing the enclosed, I have but a moment to write to you ; but it is absolutely necessary for your safety, for your present comfort, and your future happiness, that you should leave this part of the country as speedily as possible. The anger of Lord Woodhall, when all is made known to him, will be excited, as you may well suppose, to the very highest pitch of fury. He has immense influence at Court, and can destroy you. I am not sure that it would not be better and safer for you to betake yourself to Holland for a time ; in which idea, I have enclosed for you a letter to a gentleman at the Hague, who will show you kindness.

“ You may trust upon my doing all I can for you during your absence, both out of

consideration for yourself and for our friend Moraber.

“ You can consult Lady Danvers in the West, as to the best means of keeping yourself concealed till this storm has blown by; but, whatever you may think of the circumstances in which you are placed, believe that my judgment is best, and take the advice of

“ Your sincere friend,

“ NORFOLK.”

Ralph gazed at the letter, for several minutes, with a pale cheek and anxious eye; but then some one knocked at his door, and the voice of one of Lady Danvers's servants said, “ My lady, sir, wishes to speak with you immediately.”

“ I will come in a moment,” replied Ralph; and, folding up the Duke of Norfolk's letter once more, he proceeded with it in his hand to Hortensia's apartments.

## CHAPTER V.

IN one of the largest houses of that day, in London, and in that fashionable suburb, which lay in the immediate vicinity of the palace, sat a young lady in deep mourning, weeping bitterly. She was quite alone, in her own room ; and the face once almost ruddy with the hue of country health, looked now pale and delicate. The wits about the court, who, by any chance, had seen her, either at her father's residence, or during a former visit to the court, had not failed to have their remark, their jest, or their gallant speech, upon the occasion of her altered appearance.

One man, of exceedingly refined taste, declared that she looked far more lovely since she had cast away what he called that "very vivid rose," which made her look like a lovely dairy-maid.

Another observed, that his Lordship was fonder, he believed, of lilies than of roses.

A third rejoined, that these were not lilies, but faded roses ; and a fourth declared that his two noble friends made it out clearly, that the lady had the gift of weeping rose-water for her brother's death, as it was evidently by the process of distillation she had become so pale.

Little did any of the gay mockers know all the sources of poor Margaret's tears. True, she wept much for her brother's death. She had loved him well ; as he had loved her. There had been something in his frank and generous nature peculiarly attractive to a heart like hers. Even his rashness, his vehemence, which were occasionally excessive, were all tempered towards her, and had only the effect of

making her shrinkingly withhold from him the one great secret of her life. The thought that that secret love might have been the near, or even the remote, cause of her brother's violent death, added double bitterness to her tears. But this was not all. Margaret wept for her lover, as well as for her brother—wept for the slayer, as well as for the slain. She knew, with a certainty that might have made her swear to the fact, that the provocation must have been great indeed, that could induce Ralph to draw the sword upon her brother Henry ; she felt for the severe struggle which must have taken place in his mind, before he sought the fatal spot. She felt for all he must have experienced when their swords crossed, and Henry fell. She felt for all he must have endured in the anguish of his flight, and for all he was still enduring, wherever he might have sought refuge.

“Remorse and despair, both in one,” she exclaimed, “these must be his portion



just now, poor Ralph ! Remorse, for having taken my brother's life ; and despair, for having by his own act placed an impassable bar between us for ever. Oh yes, whatever they may tell me, I know, I feel, he loves me still. If he have, indeed, trifled for an hour with this bright and beautiful Hortensia Danvers, all his love for Margaret must have returned, I am certain, when he saw my poor Henry, lying on the grass. No man can forget the love of early years so easily—at least, not Ralph. I know what he will feel, I know what he will think ; and sure I am, that no one here, not even myself or my father, will weep for poor Henry as bitterly as he does.”

Oh, abiding confidence of woman's love, what is like thee ? No other passion—no other feeling—no other thought, pervades the whole of being, takes possession of every faculty, clings to the heart, rules and subjugates the mind, sets reason and argument and conviction at defiance, like thee. It must be based in true love, however—not

the paltry passion, the half-indifferent liking, the admiration warmed a little by propinquity and habit, the convenient, half mercenary, half ambitious tenderness—none of those luke-warm mixtures of heart and brain, which stand, white-gloved, and orange-flowered, before the altar of a fashionable church, and are recorded under the desecrated name of love, to have that very record blotted out, ere a few short years are over, by the bitter drops of regret, or the burning spots of shame. No, no, it must be true, full, whole hearted love—the love that gets a grasp upon the very soul—the love that is immortal as the soul itself.

And such was Margaret's love for her poor cousin. For him she wept, as much as for her brother Henry ; since she felt that his soul must be dead, if his body lived ; and that the fallen man was happier than he whose existence was prolonged.

At that moment, Margaret thought little

of herself, or of her own future fate. She was of an unselfish nature, and her first thoughts were never—as so many's are—of the cares, anxieties, and griefs, which the events of the day might bring upon herself. Imagination would, indeed, from time to time, force upon her some recollection of her own prospects and situation—dim, hovering phantoms, wandering round the extreme verge of thought, but never coming near enough to be tangible.

But, for the time, her feelings, rather than her thoughts, were alive principally to the fate of her brother and of her lover. Of her father, it is true, she thought often and painfully ; but his deep grief might have affected her more, had it been of a character more like her own. There was, however, an eager, fiery fierceness in it, with which she could have no sympathy. He called down curses upon the head of him who had deprived him of his son ; he vowed vengeance, ay, and sought it ; declaring that life only should bound his

purposes of revenge. Margaret, indeed, did not give much credence to such vows. Without having studied it, without having even thought of it, she knew her father's character well. It had sunk into her mind, as it were, making its impress, from infancy upwards, more and more deeply every year. She knew him to be warm-hearted, kind, generous, passionate, somewhat careless ; not without ability—not without consistency, if not continuity, of purpose. She had never seen any passion maintain a long and powerful influence over him, however vehement might be the outbreak at first. Grief, from which man usually flies with eagerness, as his natural enemy—as the enemy of all his desires at every period of life—had had a greater hold upon him than any other affection of the mind to which she had ever seen him subject. She remembered well the period of her mother's death, which had occurred some five or six years before, and how, long afterwards, a deep, brooding melancholy,

had hung over Lord Woodhall ; how slow was his return to cheerfulness, and how frequently the fits of gloom would come back. But even those had passed away ; and she doubted not that this present frantic rage against poor, unhappy Ralph, would pass away likewise.

She somewhat feared, indeed, what might be the result, when the violence of passion should subside—when that which for the time seemed to bear away grief upon its fiery wings, should sink down, either gratified or wearied out, and leave him alone in sorrow and desolation. Then she knew would be the struggle ; then, when he daily saw the empty place at the table, when he missed the beloved face, when he heard no more the cheerful voice, when the presence which was sunshine to him, and the gallant bearing in which he took such a pride, were found wanting—when the house looked vacant and lonely, and the meals were cheerless and solitary, and the evenings went by unenlivened,

and the day ended with the knowledge that he was gone. Then, she thought, when her mind turned in that direction, then will sorrow be fully felt in all its heavy weight, then will the anguish which is now divided by rage, bow him to the earth; and then must be the time for me to struggle with my own griefs in order to lighten his. Now, it would be vain to say a word. To oppose his wrath against poor Ralph, would be madness : to offer him consolation, as vain.

From time to time these thoughts came upon her ; and, sad and bitter as they were, they afforded her some relief ; for the others—those which I have described before—were so much more intense and painful, that anything which led her mind away from them was a blessing for the time. She might have looked round all the world for some surpassing woe, without finding any which could compare in her heart with that which the death of her brother, by the hand of her lover, had

inflicted. They were both so dear—so unutterably dear—they were both so linked with every affection, every memory, every hope, that the one, who was dead to all, and the other, who must be dead to her, left the flowery landscape of life, which had lain so lately smiling before her, nothing but a dark, desolate wilderness. It was like a fair scene, just torn by an earthquake, and bearing not one trace of its former aspect.

It was over such thoughts that she was now weeping, rather more than a fortnight after her brother's death. Her father had gone forth, still actuated by the same fierce desire of vengeance, to move every power of the court to gratify that burning thirst ; for those were days in which influence, and even wealth—money, base, corrupted money—made the very scales of justice quiver. He had been more harsh and ferocious that day than usual ; he had dwelt upon the particulars of her poor brother's death, with a painful, lingering

minuteness which tore poor Margaret's heart. He seemed anxious to lash his resentment to such a pitch that it would bear all before it ; and he left the house, declaring that he would bring Ralph to the gallows, or perish. This scene, as he had walked up and down the room, looking angrily at the floor, and every now and then stopping to add some bitter or painful word more, was full in Margaret's mind when she retired to her own chamber, and there sat down to weep as I have described. It was one of the darkest hours which had fallen upon her since her brother's death ; for the probability of Ralph being found and taken—being brought to trial and condemned—was brought more painfully home to her heart that it had ever been before.

All seemed darkness and despair around her. What should she do in such a case ? How should she act ? Throw herself at her father's feet, and beseech him to forbear and be merciful ?



She knew it was vain—all vain. She might as well beseech the hurricane. Should she leave him whom she so dearly loved, to perish unseen, unsupported, unconsolated? She knew her own heart would perish also. Should she fly to him—cast off all restraint—make her fate and his interpose between her father and his vengeance, and say, “Strike him through me!”

But her brother’s spirit seemed to stand in the way of the very thought, crying—“Margaret, Margaret, he slew me!”

Poor Margaret could only weep; and bitterly, painfully, did she weep; but while the tears were still streaming, as rapidly as ever, down her cheeks, a light tap was heard at the door, and, without waiting to be told, Dora, her maid, entered the room. She was an old and faithful servant, who had waited many years upon her mother; somewhat stiff, indeed, but full of love for all the children of the family—one of those attached servants of an English household, which are hardly

*She* (to be found in any other land. She had wept over the death of poor Master Henry, as she called him, as bitterly as any one ; but she had shared Margaret's feelings, rather than those of the old lord. She had loved Henry well, but she loved Ralph nearly as well, for she had known him from the cradle ; had known his mother, too, and every one who had known her, had loved her. Ralph had always shown a great attachment to her. As a child, he would sit with his arms round her neck, and call her " his dody," in infantine endeavour to articulate her name. The very first comfort which Margaret had received, came from her lips, very shortly after the fatal news arrived.

" Do not take on so, Mistress Margaret," she said, adhering still to the term mistress, which was but beginning to decline. " The dead can never be brought back by weeping ; and if your tears are for the living, as I can't help thinking they be in part, I dare say, if you knew all, Master

Ralph is not so much to blame as you think. I don't see, for my own part, why the good old lord goes on so madly against poor Master Ralph. My lord fought two men in his day himself, and killed one of them ; and he would not have a gentleman refuse to fight, I am sure, when he was asked. Master Henry—God rest him!—was hot and passionate enough, as you know ; and I dare say he provoked poor Ralph more than he could bear. Perhaps he was deceived about something, and wouldn't listen to reason ; for he took up things very hastily, and all things are not as they seem at first ; and I am sure Master Ralph would not give real cause of offence to man, or woman either, for he is as good, and kind, and noble-hearted a lad as any in all the world. But if people will not listen to reason, and hear things explained, what can one do ?—and that was always Master Henry's way. A word and a blow, and the blow came first."

I have said that this speech, somewhat

incoherent as it was, had comforted Margaret greatly ; and it gave her comfort in more ways than one. She remembered the letter which Henry had shewn her, and the impression which it had produced upon her mind ; and a doubt, a thought, a hope, that they might both have been deceived—that the letter was either a fabrication, or might be explained—arose, and grew stronger and stronger every moment. What right had she to judge him unheard ? she asked herself : what right had Henry ? and, knowing the weakness of her brother's temper, his rashness, and his punctiliousness upon the point of honour, she easily conceived that he actually compelled Ralph to draw his sword, without listening to anything he might say in his own defence.

The sight, therefore, of her good Dora was pleasant to her ; and she did not even try to wipe away the tears she was shedding when she entered, but, holding out her arms to her, leaned her head upon her shoulder, and wept there.

“There, there, my dear child,” said the good woman; “you have been sorry enough, and don’t you be afraid of all that the old Lord says. He’ll not do half that he thinks. It’s poor, powerless work, when old men begin to swagger. I heard him going on, when you were in the withdrawing-room with him; but he’ll do nothing; and I dare to say that Master Ralph will easily shew that he was driven to do what he did. And now, my bird, wipe your eyes, there’s a dear child. Here’s a little saucy boy down stairs wants to see you. He has been out there, over the way, for an hour, till the old Lord went out, and then he came over, and asked for you. Harrison sent for me, but the lad won’t talk to any one but you, for he has got a letter to deliver into your own hand, he says—a love-letter, I don’t doubt;” and the old woman laughed a little. “I don’t doubt that it’s a love-letter; for it isn’t in Master Ralph’s hand—that was my hope at first—but it’s a great, sprawling, twisting

hand, and the boy's all decked out as fine as a groat—a sort of page-looking lad, with a band of feathers round his hat, quite fantastical.”

“Send him away,” said Margaret, sadly ; “I will not see him. I have nothing to do with love-letters, Dora.”

“But you cannot tell it is a love-letter,” replied the waiting-woman ; “that was only my fancy, and, indeed, my dear child, you should see him, for he won't give it to anybody but you, and you cannot tell what it may be about, and it's always right to look at a letter, and it is but civil.”

“Well, bring him up,” replied Margaret ; “but stay you here, Dora, till he is gone.”

The boy was brought up so rapidly, that, had Margaret been in a very observing mood, she might have suspected he had not been very far from the door while the conversation just detailed was passing between her and her woman. But she only noticed that he came ; that he was a

gay-looking boy of thirteen or fourteen years of age, very much like what Dora had described ; and that he asked her carefully, ere he gave the letter, whether she was Mistress Margaret Woodhall. Her mind was too much occupied with other things to notice or attend to any more.

She answered his question in the affirmative, took the letter, and then, gently bowing her head, dismissed the boy, saying, " I will send my reply if this should require one."

" Well, I do think," said Dora, " seeing he is so smart a youth, I would have tried to find out where he came from. Letters do not always tell who sent them, and—"

" Nonsense—nonsense, Dora !" interrupted Margaret. " I care not whom it comes from, nor whence it comes." And much to the good woman's inconvenience, she continued to hold the letter, unopened,

in her hand, gazing on the ground and falling gradually into thought.

“Well, really !” exclaimed Dora, after she had waited some five minutes.

Rather startled by the sharpness of the sound, than clearly understanding its meaning, Margaret languidly opened the letter and fixed her eye upon the page.

The moment she did so, the whole expression of her face altered ; her eyes recovered their brightness, and were fixed eagerly on the lines beneath them ; the colour mounted up into her cheek ; her lip lost its dejected stillness, and bent into a sweet, hopeful smile. And then, as if there were magic in the ending lines, she started up, let the note drop from her hold, and pressed her hand tightly upon her heart.

Dora pounced upon the letter in an instant, took it up, unchidden or forbid, and gazed at the words it contained.



They were large enough, Heaven knows ; but still her spectacles were habitually needful ; and, retreating a step, for fear her young lady should attempt to stop her, she mounted them on her nose, and read.

“Fear not, my child”—so the letter ran —“fear not ! Fate has done its work with your poor brother. It could not be otherwise. It was doomed to be so. I warned you, you would have many trials ; but fear not, shrink not. More must yet come ; but they will pass away ; and, though a multitude may seem to stand between you and happiness, yet shrink not, doubt not ! Your fate depends upon yourself : the stars do not *rule*, but *counsel*, you. Be firm—be true—be happy.

“Above all, doubt not him who loves you. Trust to tried affection and long-known truth, and be assured that he who may now seem guilty is innocent as yourself. He who seems most innocent is guilty. You sent not to me in the hour of

need, as I bade you ; but I watched over you, and will come to your comfort when you seek me not. Be firm and true.

“ MORABER.”

“ Goodness gracious ! If that is not the wise man in the old tower !” exclaimed Dora, when she had arrived at the name, and made it out with some difficulty. “ Lord bless me, Mistress Margaret ! how can he know anything about you ?”

Margaret had sunk into her chair again, without an effort to prevent the good woman from reading the letter ; and, in deep thought, made no reply to the question, till Dora had repeated it twice.

“ You talked to me much about him, Dora,” she replied at length : “ I went to see him—that is all.”

“ And never told me a word !” muttered Dora. “ Ah, my pretty child ! I can guess, dear one—I can guess, my bird ! Well,

love sees with his own eyes, and I say not they are bad ones, though folks call him blind. He's no bad judge, I wot, though he judges not as old lords and great people judge. Marry! they would have people men and women of the world's making, not of God's. But you can't fashion flesh and blood like a coach or a coat. Nature says 'shall;' and who shall gainsay her? Love's not a loose cloak to fit every one; and it's a garment which can but be bought once, and won't turn. Don't tear it my dear; for patch it you can't; and old Moraber is right, depend upon it. He always is."

"Pray God he is so now!" ejaculated Margaret fervently. Then throwing her arms round Dora in a wild burst of strong emotion, she wept again as profusely as ever, but far more happily. How the heart catches at the least assurance of that which it longs to believe! Oh, dry and dusty earth of which we are made, how soon is it fired by the least spark of hope! I re-

member hearing of that famous, lost Greek fire, how, one time, being spilt by accident in the paths of a great city, no effort could put it out : it burned through theatres and dwelling-places, through the great church, through its stone pavement, down to the very graves beneath. And this is Hope, unextinguishable even in the tomb. But beyond is the first world of reality, where Hope, the wanderer, meets her sister, Joy.

Yes ; from so slight and frail an assurance as that of the strange, wild letter she had just received, Margaret's thought-world was re-lighted ; the darkness past in part away : she dared to look forward : she dared to withdraw her eyes from her brother's tomb : she boldly said to herself—

“ Come what may, I will be firm and true.”

But, as a consequence of that letter, another comfort, not more substantial, not more sustaining, but still infinitely great,

was afforded her. Her old servant's words showed her that the secret of her heart had been penetrated ; that no glowing explanation—no timid hesitation—no word—no sign—was needed farther ; that she had some one to confide in, some one to counsel and to aid. The counsel might not be the wisest, the aid not the most powerful ; but she stood no longer alone in the sorrow of her own heart.

## CHAPTER VI.

WE left Ralph Woodhall proceeding towards the apartments of Hortensia Danvers, with the Duke of Norfolk's letter in his hand. He seemed puzzled and confused ; but his determination was soon taken.

“ I might have foreseen this,” he said to himself. “ It could not be long concealed ; and I must bear my destiny. But I will not encounter the good old lord with any attempt at justification. The Duke of Norfolk is perhaps right. It would be better for me to be absent for a time, seeking

fortune in the west, or, perhaps, in Holland, till the first burst of wrath has passed. I can trust to Margaret's love."

With these thoughts, he entered the sitting-room of Lady Danvers, where he found her standing by a table, dressed for her journey, and looking towards the door, as if anxious for his coming.

"Well, they have set you free," she said, "but I have been in some fear about you; not that you would not appear at the time, if you could; but that you might not be able. I sent to ask you to speak with me, last night; but, to my surprise, found you were absent."

She spoke with a peculiar emphasis, and Ralph replied, with a faint, melancholy smile, "I was absent for some hours, Lady Danvers—how employed, I may find another opportunity of telling you. At present, let me shew you this letter from the Duke of Norfolk. I have, unfortunately, incurred the anger of my noble relation, Lord Woodhall. He is a good man,

but violent to an exceeding degree when excited; and the Duke advises me strongly to hurry away into the west, till I can take ship for Holland. There is his letter; you can read what he says."

"No need, no need!" ejaculated Lady Danvers, putting the letter aside. "I know it all—all that has happened. Poor young man! Well may you speak in so sad a tone, Mr. Woodhall. But the Duke is right. There is no resource for you but to keep in retirement for a time, till this has passed over. Depend upon it, Lord Woodhall will move heaven and earth to ruin you. To the west! *I* am going to the west; but my course will be too slow. You must set off instantly."

"So I propose," rejoined Ralph; "though to what exact spot I shall turn my steps, I do not know. That is a part of the country I am unacquainted with."

"I will decide it for you," said Hortensia. "Let it be Danvers Newchurch. Stay! I will give you a letter to my



steward, who is the man, of all others, to aid you, and to take means for insuring your safety."

"Nay, dear Lady Danvers," replied Ralph, "I am under no such great apprehension as you seem to think. I have done nothing that any man of heart would not have done, or that any man of honour might not have done. I would fain, it is true, avoid all personal collision with Lord Woodhall, in his present state of rage; but for my personal safety I have no fear. He is a man of too much honour to resent what has occurred by any unworthy means."

"There is no knowing—there is no knowing," observed Lady Danvers. "Your life is too precious to others—to your poor father—to be lightly risked. Is your horse in a fit state to carry you? If not, take one from my servants. They are well mounted, and their beasts must be perfectly fresh by this time."

"Oh, mine is quite fit and strong," re-

turned Ralph. "The slight journey he has had, can have but little effect upon so strong and tried an animal."

"Well, I will write the letter," resumed Lady Danvers, with the same eager and quick manner in which she had hitherto been speaking. "You go and bid your servant (who is arrived, I am told) to get all things ready. Alice, Alice, bring me back the ink and paper."

Ralph hastened to follow her suggestion, and found Gaunt Stilling in sharp conversation with a man who seemed to stand in great awe of him.

"Get you back to Norwich, Master Roger," said Stilling, in a more angry tone than Ralph had ever heard him use before. "If I find you watching our movements, I will break every bone in your skin, and take that as an instalment of what your master owes me."

"I must wait till I have baited my horse, Master Stilling," replied Roger.

"I should like to know what the devil brought you here!" cried the other; but he was interrupted by the call of his master, and only paused to add, "Mind what I have said. I am not one to be trifled with, as you ought to know by this time."

Ralph gave his orders rapidly, then returned to his own room, for a few moments. and then once more sought Hortensia, for the letter she had promised. It was written, sealed, and addressed to "Master William Drayton, Danvers Newchurch, by Harstock, Dorset."

She placed it in Ralph's hands, gazing at him with a look of deep and melancholy interest. There was also an air of hesitation about her, as she asked, "Is all ready?"

"I dare say it is, by this time," replied Ralph. "Accept my best thanks, dear Lady Danvers, for all the kind interest you have taken in me, especially in the painful circumstances in which I am placed."

She waved her hand, almost impatiently,

saying, "Not a word, not a word, my good friend ; but there is one thing more I wish to say—" Again she hesitated, but then added, quickly, and in a tone full of kindly feeling, "Ralph, I look upon you as a relation. I cannot regard your mother's son in any other light. You came away with me hastily yesterday. You had no time to provide funds for a long journey. No false delicacy between you and me—"

Ralph took her hand, and raised it to his lips ; and, as he did so, he thought that it trembled very much. "Thanks, a thousand thanks," he said ; "and I would accept your kind offer as frankly as it is made, but I have quite enough here, Lady Danvers. My servant has brought a large part of my baggage with him, and in it is the little store which was to last me for six months."

"Well, well, go then," she said. "Do not delay a moment, for I am apprehensive till you are out of the old lord's reach."

We shall meet again, my friend, and talk over all these details more at leisure. At present, nothing is to be done but to part as soon as possible."

Again Ralph kissed her hand, which was beautiful enough, though, to say truth, her lips were the more tempting of the two. He was soon in the stable-yard, and found his horse saddled and the baggage all arranged. In another moment, he rode out under the archway of the inn, and remarked a face gazing from a little window at the side, which commanded a view both of the stable-yard and of the street. Gaunt Stilling shook his fist at it, as they passed; and, while his master paused to say a few words to the Duke of Norfolk's servants, who were gathered round the gate, Stilling laid his finger significantly on the hilt of a good strong sword, which, by this time, he had added to his travelling equipage.

Ralph was then turning his horse to the

right hand, in the direction of the western road, when Gaunt Stilling rode up to his side, saying, in a low voice, "This way, sir. We are watched, and must give them the slip. I can find the way, I think, by the back lanes, as they have directed me. After we get past Ely, I know every foot of the road for a hundred miles."

Ralph readily followed his suggestion, but enquired, after riding a few yards—

"Who is watching us? One of Lord Woodhall's people?"

"No," replied Stilling, in his quaint, bluff way. "Knave Robert's knave, Roger."

"I wish to heaven it was his master instead," said Ralph, with a quick glow of the cheek and flash of the eye.

"Ay, so do I," returned Gaunt Stilling, gloomily; "but he always contrives to put some one else in his place, when that place is a dangerous one. Every man has his time, however; and his is waiting for him."

He then relapsed into silence, and they

pursued their way without interruption. Nothing remarkable occurred on the road, throughout the whole journey, though, as the reader knows, it led them across nearly the widest part of Great Britain. Ralph himself was silent and melancholy, and many painful considerations pressed upon his mind, withdrawing it from that enjoyment of changing scene and rapid motion, which a young and ardent heart, like his, might well have experienced in traversing the beautiful counties which lie between Norfolk and Dorsetshire. His thoughts were almost entirely of Margaret. He saw little—he observed little—and conversation he had none; for Gaunt Stilling, though evidently a man superior in intellect, to his class, and who had received the education of the world, as well as of books, was taciturn and gloomy. He had never spoken much and what he had said had been generally brief and blunt; but now he hardly uttered a word, and re-

mained, usually, apart from all other servants, or society of any kind, in the inns where they chanced to stop on the road.

Ralph, remarked, too, that when his bill was brought to him at any of these places, no charge was ever made for his servant, or his servant's horse ; and the strange circumstances in which the man had been placed with him, came back from time to time upon his mind, with a feeling not altogether agreeable. That he had been useful—serviceable—ay, and zealous in his service—Ralph felt ; but it was unpleasant to him to have such gratuitous attendance, especially where it involved no light expense to the person rendering it. He determined he would have some explanation upon this subject from Gaunt Stilling ; but the man's taciturnity, his own busy thoughts, and the rapidity with which they passed from place to place, made him delay the execution of his intention, till



they reached the locality of their temporary sojourn.

Upon the frontiers of Somersetshire and Dorsetshire, Gaunt Stilling seemed to enter upon a well-known land. He had before displayed a very good knowledge of the country lying between the isle of Ely and the Mendip hills—an extent sufficient to try his geographical information ; but now, not a single lane or bye road was unknown to him. He knew where comfortable inns could be found, in the most remote parts of a country which was not, at that time, well cultivated or largely populated ; and Ralph could not help thinking that, if it were really necessary for him to play at hide-and-seek at all, which he began to doubt, he could not have a better instructor in the game than his present companion.

Gaunt Stilling, however, maintained a dull silence ; answered in monosyllables, though civilly ; and never ex-

ceeded above two or three words, except once, when, on crossing the beautiful Mendip hills, he said—

“I have brought you forty miles out of the way, sir, not for the sake of giving you that fine view, but for the purpose of avoiding the lands of old Lady Coldenham. I should soon be known there, and you would be found out through me. Then the news would fly across the country as rapidly as possible.”

“I really do not see the need of such extreme precaution,” replied Ralph, musing.

“Don’t you, sir?” said Gaunt Stilling; and then the conversation dropped.

At length, one afternoon, about a couple of hours before sunset, they passed through a long, deep lane, sunk beneath the level of the neighbouring fields, and overhung by tall and shady trees, in the full richness of their summer foliage. Even at those spots where the head of a horseman rose above the bank, no view over the country was to

be obtained ; for rich orchards spread along on either side.

At the termination of a quarter of a mile's riding, the sunshine was seen streaming up the end of the lane ; and, in a few minutes more, Ralph stood upon the verge of a gentle descent, where the eye ranged freely along one of the most beautiful valleys he ever beheld. A considerable portion of the ground in front, was laid out as a park, with sloping lawns and large ancient trees, on both sides of a stream of some extent, which ran rapidly, dashing and sparkling, down the dell. In the wilder land, which spread forth beyond the limits of the park, and on an elevated spot, about two hundred yards from the river, appeared a large stone edifice ; perhaps, of the reign of Henry the Seventh or Eighth, for it bore some of the characteristics of the best period of Tudor architecture.

At the distance of about a bow-shot from the house, but within the limits of the park,

rose a beautiful church from the bosom of a small grove of trees. Not less than three centuries and a half before, it might have deserved the name of New Church ; for even if any architect could have been found to imitate so perfectly the early English architecture, the lichens and mosses, the hue of the stone, and the crumbling of the antique mouldings, would have clearly denoted how long it had been constructed.

“ There is Danvers Newchurch, sir,” said Gaunt Stilling ; “ but we must take a little round to get to the gates.”

“ It seems a peaceful spot enough,” said Ralph, in reply.

“ Peaceful !” echoed Gaunt Stilling, almost inaudibly. “ Is there such a thing as peace ?”

In a few minutes more, they had entered the park, and were riding up to the house, under the old stone gateway of which were sitting, a hale, good-looking, well-dressed man, past the middle age, and

an elderly woman, with a young child, reading a horn-book at their feet.

"That is Master Drayton, I take it," said Gaunt Stilling; and, riding up, Ralph dismounted, and presented Lady Danvers's letter.

"This is for me," said the man upon the steps, opening the letter. "I suppose my lady will soon be coming."

At the same moment, he unfolded the sheet, and fixed his eyes upon the contents. They seemed to startle him; for although he said, as a sort of comment while he read—"Of course—certainly—to be sure,"—his broad brow was contracted, and his whole face assumed a hesitating look.

"You are quite welcome, sir," he said, when he had done; "and I will do the best I can for you. My lady's orders shall be obeyed to the utmost of my power; but I can't resist the law, you know."

"Resist the law!" exclaimed Ralph. "Surely Lady Danvers does not ask you to

do that. Besides, there is no necessity on my account."

"Well, sir, you know best," replied Mr. Drayton; "but I think it will be as well if you would just step into this room, and talk with me for a moment."

Then, opening the door of the house, Mr. Drayton led the way to a small ante-room of the great hall. When there, he said, after having closed the door,

"What I meant just now, sir, was merely that I would do everything, as in duty bound, to hide you; but that, if officers should come to take you, I could not think myself justified in resisting with a strong hand."

"Officers come to take me!" echoed Ralph, completely bewildered. "There must be some mistake, my good sir. May I be permitted to look at Lady Danvers's letter?"

"Oh, certainly, sir," replied the steward. "There is nothing that you need not

see." And he placed the letter in Ralph's hand, who read as follows :—

“ MASTER DRAYTON,

“ This will be given into your hands by Mr. Ralph Woodhall, the son of my poor mother's dearest friend, and consequently *my* friend. You will shew him every attention in your power, and let him make use of Danvers Newchurch as if it were his own, providing suitably all things for himself and his servant. It will be necessary to keep good watch around the place, and not suffer him to be at all molested by any one, as he has had the misfortune of killing, in a duel, his cousin, the son of Lord Woodhall, who is highly incensed against him.”

Ralph let the paper fall from his hand, and gazed upon Mr. Drayton with a look of unmingled astonishment.

“ In the name of heaven,” he at length exclaimed, “ what is the meaning of this ?

Henry Woodhall killed in a duel! and by me! I cannot believe my senses, when I see such an assertion under the hand of Lady Danvers. She must have been grossly and terribly misled. But there must be some foundation for this." And, opening the door vehemently, he made his way to the outer porch, and called aloud—"Stilling, Stilling!"

The man, who was leading the horses up and down, returned to the door, and Ralph at once demanded, "What is this? Lady Danvers, in her letter to Mr. Drayton here, declares that my cousin Henry has been killed in a duel."

"Well, sir, did you not know it?" asked Stilling, in a cold tone.

"Know it!" exclaimed Ralph. "How, in Heaven's name, should I know it? You never mentioned the subject to me during the whole course of the journey."

"I thought it would be too painful a subject, sir," replied the man, with a very



peculiar look. "You had the Duke of Norfolk's letter."

"The Duke never mentioned a word of it," returned Ralph. "Good God, this will drive me mad !" And, turning on his heel, he walked back into the house, followed by Mr. Drayton ; when, casting himself into a chair, he covered his eyes with his hands, in an agony of grief and consternation.

Gaunt Stilling tied the horses to an iron railing, and followed him quietly ; and good Mr. Drayton, as much moved to attention and respect towards the young stranger by the agony he saw him suffer, as by his lady's letter, did all that he could imagine would comfort and console him. I was not much he could think of, it is true ; for he was a man of material thoughts and habits. He could tell the number of acres, roods, and poles in every farm upon the estate, and how they should be cultivated. He knew the condition and the wants of every labourer, every tenant ; and he

tried his best to ameliorate the one and to diminish the other. But to deal with deep sorrow—to sooth an intelligent mind and feeling heart—were tasks above or beyond his scope. At best—and it was his only resource—he might try to divert the thoughts of one afflicted from the causes of grief. He had done so with many a mendicant at the hall-door; for he was no harsh and cruel deputy-despot; and he tried, at least, to add comfort to gifts. He endeavoured even now to alleviate sorrow. He teased Ralph about bed-rooms, and first and second tables, and what he would require during his stay, till at length, he pressed him so hard upon these subjects, that Ralph rose and followed him to the rooms he proposed to shew him, with a gloomy air and heavy step, from which all the elasticity of youth seemed gone.

Gaunt Stilling looked after him with a hesitating, uncertain expression of countenance, as if he did not know whether to follow him or not. But, after a moment's consideration, he turned round, led the

horses to the stables, and, after having given them, with some directions, into the hands of a country lad whom he saw there, returned to the house and sought out his master, whom he found sitting sorrowfully alone, Mr. Drayton having quitted him, in order to make the necessary preparations for his comfort.

The moment Gaunt Stilling entered the room, Ralph motioned him to shut the door, and said,

“Now, tell me more of this sad affair, Stilling. I am calmer now; and, though I wish you had spoken to me on the subject as we came hither, by which you would have stopped my journey entirely, yet, I dare say, you were under the same mistake which it seems has been made by others.”

“Why, sir,” replied the servant, in a tone of some feeling, “I saw you very melancholy and sad; and, as the Duke himself had written to you, I naturally concluded

that you were right well aware of all. You may easily judge that the death of Mr. Henry Woodhall was the subject of talk with the whole of the Duke's house ; and when he had written to you, I could not presume to speak to you on the matter, without your speaking to me."

"The Duke's letter I must have misunderstood entirely," observed Ralph. "Fearful of wounding my feelings, it would seem, he wrote, in vague, general terms, of unfortunate events, and unhappy circumstances. My imagination, utterly ignorant of what had taken place, fixed upon other events and circumstances. But all that matters not. Now I would know the whole. It would seem that they attributed poor Henry's death to me?"

"Yes, sir, everybody thought so," answered Gaunt Stilling. "They said that Mr. Woodhall had discovered that you and his sister were in love with each other, contrary to the wishes of the family ; that

he had challenged you, and that you had killed him."

"But you must have known better," said Ralph, half sternly.

The man's countenance fell, and his brow became clouded, as if the tone of the master whom he served gratuitously, had wounded his pride.

Ralph went on, however, saying—

"You should have contradicted it at once, Stilling. The Duke might be deceived; for he could not tell that I had not returned secretly; but you must have known I never re-entered my room from the time I quitted it in the morning."

"Yes, sir," replied Stilling, in a quiet tone; "but there was no need of re-entering your room. You had a sword with you, and had but to ride back, fight your adversary, and disappear."

"True, true," returned his master. "But did you really think I had done so?"

Gaunt Stilling hesitated, but answered, at length,

“ I certainly did not, sir ; but I was in no circumstances to speak my mind. Everything, indeed, seemed against it, to my apprehension, till the morning after.”

“ And what happened then to make you change your opinion ?” asked Ralph.

“ Why, I heard, at the inn where Lady Danvers stopped,” replied Stilling, “ that you had gone out about half past eight o’clock, and had not been seen by anybody for some hours. Now, the duel took place between ten and eleven ; and, with a quick-going horse, you might easily have got to Norwich within the time.”

Ralph pressed his hand to his brow, saying, as if in reply to some question which had arisen in his mind,

“ That explains it—that explains it all ! How Lady Danvers could have imagined that I had been guilty of this act, I was at a loss to comprehend ; but now I see it all !”

“ Guilty, sir !” exclaimed Gaunt Stilling, whose old soldier’s habits made him view

such events in a very different light from that in which his master regarded them. "No great guilt, I think, in killing a man in fair and open combat, without advantage—especially when he was the person to seek it."

"We may think differently," returned Ralph; "but this, at least, I will tell you, Stilling—that if my hand had shed poor Henry's blood, in such a quarrel as this, I never should forgive myself to my dying day.—Leave me now, Stilling. You will be well taken care of here, and I will send for you soon, to seek for any farther information I may want. At present, my mind is all in wild confusion, and I must try to calm my thoughts, and decide upon what is to be done next. My first impulse is, to set off at once for London, and clear myself of this deed."

"Better give the horses some rest, sir," said Gaunt Stilling; "we have come at a rattling pace, and they won't do much more

just at present.—Besides, it would be well to think whether you could clear yourself so easily as to prevent disagreeable consequences. Four or five months' imprisonment, waiting for trial, is no very pleasant thing ; and the very fact of your running away here in such haste, would require a good deal of explanation, for other people might not understand it quite as well as you do yourself."

Ralph looked at him earnestly, and said, in a low, deep voice,

" You surely do not still suppose me guilty ?"

" Not in the least, sir," replied the man, frankly. " I am quite sure you are not ; and I can even give a guess, and a pretty shrewd one, as to what was the mistake which made you follow the Duke's advice so readily ; but all I think is, that other people may not understand the matter so well, and that in order to clear yourself in a hurry of this accusation, you would proba-



bly be forced to explain other matters which might be unpleasant for you to touch upon."

"I will think over it, I will think over it," said Ralph. And Gaunt Stilling, seeing him fall into a deep reverie, quietly left the room.

## CHAPTER VII.

CANDLES were lighted in a small, beautiful room at Danvers Newchurch ; and Ralph Woodhall sat at a table covered with delicacies which he could little have expected to find in so remote a place. He gave small heed to them, however. He ate what was merely needful for sustenance, and drank several glasses of fine old wine which were pressed upon him by the care of two old servants of the Danvers family—blue-bottles, as they were called in those days—who, with less to do at any time than they altogether liked, were left behind by their lady in the

country, when she journeyed far, in consideration of their age, which they themselves were not apt to regard very much. They thought themselves strong and hearty as ever, and equal to any sort of work which might be assigned to them. But Hortensia was not one to overtask any person's willingness, and she had more consideration for their years than they had themselves. Right glad were they, then, to pay every attention to a favoured guest during their mistress's absence ; and old men being very often apt at calculation, and especially at putting two stray ends of circumstances together, and linking them, as it were, with cobbler's wax, reasoned internally upon the probability of the handsome young stranger—in regard to whose fortune and fate they knew nothing—becoming, ere long, their legitimate lord and master.

Towards the end of the meal, when some fruits, at that time brought to perfection with great difficulty, and at vast

expense, had been put upon the table, Mr. Drayton himself appeared, and stood for a moment by the side of Ralph's chair, excusing the scantiness of the dinner, on the ground of the short time allowed for preparation.

"We shall treat you better to-morrow, sir," he said ; "but, in the meantime, is there any wine in the cellar you would prefer ? The keys are always left with me, and there is some very rich Burgundy, as well as Bordeaux, of the finest quality—even imperial Tokay ; for my late lord was a great judge, and the wines have improved since his death, which, come Martinmas, will be thirteen years."

"Nothing more, Mr. Drayton, nothing more, thank you," replied Ralph. "I have had quite enough, and all has been very good."

"Perhaps, sir, you would like to look through the house," said Mr. Drayton, determined not to leave the young stranger to his own bitter thoughts, if he could help

it. "It is a curious old place, and, to my mind, looks better by candle-light than at any other time. I think old places always do, for there is something about them which makes one feel that their real light is gone, and that they can only be viewed to advantage by artificial means. I think you would like to survey the mansion."

"Very well," replied Ralph, in an indifferent tone ; "I will accompany you, Mr. Drayton, when you like."

"This minute, if you please sir, and if you have done your wine," said Mr. Drayton. "Stay ! I will call people to take the lights on before, and we will go through the whole suites of apartments, beginning with the yellow guest-chamber, and going on to the green guest-chamber, and the blue guest-chamber."

"Yellow, and green, and blue guests !" echoed Ralph. "Methinks there must have been some heavier hearts even than my own here."

“ Oh, sir! it is but a name,” replied the good man ; “ and, I dare say, what we call the rooms has little to do with those who sleep in them. But now, sir, I will be ready in a moment.”

Then, ordering two of the men servants to take up two of the lights, and go in front, he led the way with a step as slow and solemn as if the place were a nunnery, and he feared to interrupt the devout orisons of its inmates.

I will not detain the reader with a particular account of the various rooms and passages through which Ralph was led, but simply dwell upon the general aspect of the place, which was stately, meditative, and even solemn. The effect, too, was heightened by every ornament and decoration to be seen ; for the late Lord Danvers had a consummate knowledge and a real taste for art.

Thus, along the old corridor, which had been converted to the purposes of a picture-gallery, the young visitor was led, pausing every now and then,

to examine more closely one or other of the portraits which hung upon the wall. The whole history of each was well known to Mr. Drayton, who gave it in full to his young companion, not, perhaps, without a little embellishment, in order to keep his attention engaged.

At first, Ralph walked listlessly enough ; but gradually his mind assumed an interest in the subjects which were laid before him, and he stopped several times to gaze at the different portraits as he passed by, asking the names and history of the personages. Some were by Sir Peter Lely—some by Van Dyke ; and the collection went as far back even as Holbein. The Danvers' family of course figured conspicuously. There were Danverses of all periods of life, from the infant, swathed up like an Egyptian mummy, to the white-bearded senior in his high-backed chair ; men in armour, with pages holding the casque, and a horse looking over the left shoulder ; gentlemen in long gowns and venerable

ruffs ; and ladies in stiff bodices, or with collars buttoned up to the chin. In addition to these, were a number of portraits representing persons, either allied to the family by blood or affection, or figuring remarkably in history. Howards, there were many ; Percys, not a few ; and, in fact, the records of each age, since the family rose to distinction, had their representatives on the walls.

Amongst the rest, were two full-length portraits of ladies in the early spring of life. One was represented standing with a large Spanish fan in her hand, while a greyhound, raised upon his hind feet, and with his curling tail dropping gracefully near to the ground, had his paws upon a table supporting a globe of gold and silver fishes, which he seemed to be eyeing with intense curiosity and some appetite. The face of the lady was exquisitely beautiful ; and Ralph had no occasion to enquire the name of the original, for the likeness to Hortensia was so strong, though the hair was a



shade less dark, that no one who had seen her could fail to recognize her mother. The other portrait was of a rather taller lady, leaning upon a marble urn, which had something sepulchral in its character. Her eyes were raised, so as to seem gazing directly at the spectator, and her right hand was stretched out as if she were offering it to the figure in the other picture. In those eyes was that deep, intense expression which is never seen—no, never—except in persons whose feelings are strong and permanent; and the painter had caught that look, and represented it with wonderful power, making the beauty of the features and of the colouring subservient to the sentiment. It was a face that Ralph knew well; and to see the portrait of his own mother side by side with that of the late Lady Danvers, made him feel indeed as if there were nearer bonds between him and Hortensia than anything like a sudden friendship, or

the acquaintance of a few short days, could afford.

“I must always feel towards her as a brother,” he thought ; “and she has nobly proved that she regards me as such. One of my first acts must be to disabuse her mind of the idea that I would so lightly draw my sword against my cousin Henry’s life.”

Then, turning to Mr. Drayton, he asked, “Is there any picture of Lady Danvers here ?”

“Only one, sir, in her own morning-room,” replied the steward. “It was taken when she was quite a child, and she would never sit for one afterwards. This is the room.” And, taking a step or two forward, he opened a door on the left.

The lights which the servants carried, slowly penetrated the gloom ; and Ralph gazed round with deep interest at the arrangement of the place where so fair and interesting a creature as Hortensia made her

ordinary abode. Nowhere could his eye rest without finding some proof of her fine taste, and of a certain spirit of order, neatness, and decoration, rarely met with in one so young. Antique cabinets of ebony, with silver hinges and locks, were in several parts of the room, containing, doubtless, many little treasures of *vertu*. A large table in the middle, supported by richly carved and twisted columns of dark black oak, was covered with miniatures, sculptures in ivory, pieces of rare china, curious ancient ornaments, one or two small books in very ancient bindings, and two or three statuettes in bronze or ivory, which might, perhaps, have employed the hand of Cellini the renowned Florentine. Here, also, were a number of specimens of the Cinquecento art placed beneath glass covers to keep them from the dust : a crucifixion in ivory, where the intense passions of the visage seemed to make the dead material live ; a drinking-cup of silver, from the sides of which stood out, in

bold relief, some scores of figures holding up wreaths of flowers to the brim, as if to catch the drops of wine that might run over, and every figure differing from the other, but anatomically perfect and full of grace ; a salt-cellar of gold, used, probably, at high festivals in days of yore, where, on a large cockleshell of gold, intended to contain the salt, stood the figure of Neptune, waving his trident over the heads of two sea-horses, while round about were exquisitely grouped, with arms sometimes linked together, sometimes cast round each other's necks or shoulders, in every different attitude that can be conceived, the numberless deities of the wave.

On the walls around, between the various cabinets and the windows, were a number of small and beautiful pictures from the hands of the greatest masters. They were principally landscapes, though, here and there, a figure-piece of the Dutch or Flemish school found admittance, where the subject fitted it for a lady's eyes. There was only

one large picture in the room, and that was of a young girl, rather fancifully dressed, putting aside with her hand the green leaves and branches of a tree, and seeming to look out from the shadowy bower on those who gazed at her in return. The face was full of life, and light, and intelligence, and joy ; youth was evidently holding revel in her heart, and the spirit of the free greenwood seemed over all. Although Hortensia's eyes had deeper things in them now—although the expression was generally, more thoughtful, more timid—and although the form, there in the bud, had blossomed into womanly loveliness,—yet Ralph had no difficulty in recognizing Hortensia in the delicate features and wild graces of the child. He paused longer there, and with deeper interest, than he had done anywhere else ; and, as the servant continued to hold up the lights before him, and Mr. Drayton stood a step behind, a slight smile came upon the face of the latter, arising, appa-

rently, from some conclusions that he was drawing in his own mind.

“This is my lady’s dressing-room,” he said, after awhile, opening a door beyond ; “and this her bed-room.”

Ralph followed, and gazed round. Here, it was evident, the same spirit resided ; but the bed-room itself was very simply arranged. There was a fire-place for a wood fire, with a mantel-piece of rich white marble, supported by two beautiful columns ; and the andirons, according to the ancient mode, were decorated with two large dogs’ heads, exquisitely sculptured in brass. Above the mantel-piece was another picture of the late Lady Danvers. The chairs were of green velvet, and the hangings of the bed the same. The pillow and the sheet were edged with lace ; and, as Ralph gazed at the spot where Hortensia laid her head to rest, he said to himself, with a strange feeling that he did not stop to analyze, “May peace and happiness ever rest there with her !”

Turning away with the good steward, he proceeded through a number of other rooms; but, though the house had some historical associations, and a number of those old dreamy stair-cases, passages, and halls, which fill the unoccupied mind with strange imaginings, no part had such an interest for him, as that which he had visited first; and he returned to the room in which he had been sitting, with the painful feelings of the day busy in his heart, but mingled with some pleasant thoughts, induced by all that he had seen in the apartments of Hortensia.

“I will now, Mr. Drayton,” he said, “write some letters, and then retire to rest.”

“Ay, sir, it is always better,” rejoined Mr. Drayton, in that commonplace tone which jars with strong emotions, “to write a letter at night, take counsel with one’s pillow, and read it over before one sends it in the morning. It seems my lady has made some mistake about this duel,

and it has taken you by surprise. You had better think well, sir, before you act in any way; for one does not always do the wisest when one acts in a hurry."

"True, true, Mr. Drayton," said Ralph, in an absent tone. "I will think before I act; but still, I must not suffer an imputation to rest upon me, which I do not deserve." And, after having procured writing materials, he proceeded to indite several letters, of which I shall only give one as a specimen.

It was addressed to Lord Woodhall, and was to the following effect.

"MY HONORED AND VERY DEAR LORD,

"I have this evening, and only this evening, learned the sad and terrible event which has occurred in your family, and which has deprived me, not only of a very dear relation, but of one who has been my friend from boyhood. Though your Lordship's grief must naturally be greater



than that of any other person, believe me that mine, upon receiving this intelligence, would have been hard enough to bear without aggravation; but, coupled with the sad information, come the strange tidings that, by some mistake, to me unaccountable, my name has been mingled with the transaction which deprived you of your dear son, and me of my friend and cousin. I cannot leave you to suppose for one moment that I would have drawn my sword upon your son; but I have farther to declare that there was no quarrel or dispute between us whatsoever; that we parted on the night of Wednesday last in perfect friendship and good feeling; and that I have not either seen or heard from him since, as I set out early on the morning of Thursday, to escort Lady Danvers westward, and have not been in Norwich since. Nay, more; it is utterly impossible that I could have been there, as I am willing to prove any day, by accounting for every mo-

ment of my time, and producing persons who were with me. If, notwithstanding my solemn assurance, your Lordship should still entertain doubts of the fact I mention, which cannot be removed by private investigation, I am not at all unwilling to abide fair and open trial; and if I do not shew that there was no possibility whatsoever of my having been on the spot, and at the hour, where and when the unfortunate transaction took place, let me be condemned as a murderer.

“ One thing, however, I would fain avoid, which is lengthened imprisonment ; but if it is publicly given forth on what day the charge against me can be tried, I pledge you my word of honor, as a man and a gentleman, I will come forward at the place named, and surrender myself to abide the result.

“ With the hope that God may comfort you in the sad affliction with which he has been pleased to visit you, and that he may

shower every blessing upon yourself and your daughter, I have the honor to subscribe myself, my Lord,

“Your Lordship’s most faithful

“And humble servant,

“RALPH WOODHALL.”

Another letter of similar import was addressed to the Duke of Norfolk, another to his own father, and another to Lady Danvers.

He would fain have written to Margaret also ; but he paused, hesitated, and finally, abandoned his intention.

When these were all concluded, he sent for Gaunt Stilling, to consult with him as to the best means of despatching the letters from that part of the country ; as communications by post were, in those days, not very rapid or secure.

“I will have them conveyed, sir,” said Stilling, taking the letters, “though Norwich and London are far apart, and Lincolnshire a good way off too ; but if the object of these letters is what I guess, I think you might save yourself the trouble and expense, which will not be small.”

“What do you guess the object is ?” asked Ralph.

The man paused for an instant, and then answered,—“To tell all these people that you are not the man who killed Mr. Henry Woodhall.”

“Do you not think it worth my while to clear myself of shedding my cousin’s blood ?” asked Ralph, with some feeling of anger at the man’s cool tone.

“Certainly, sir,” replied Stilling, “but I think it is done already, in all probability. Either you do not know well the person who first placed me with you, or he has not told you how his eyes are always on those in whom he takes an interest. His eyes need no perspective glasses, sir, and

he is just as well aware of the whole facts as you or I—better, indeed, most likely, than either of us. Nor will he let the knowledge sleep, depend upon it. He will make your cause good with those who are most concerned, whether you ask him or not.”

Ralph smiled faintly. “You seem to have great faith,” he said; “but I must not trust to anything like a chance in such matters. I should wish the letters to go.”

“Well, sir, they shall go,” replied Gaunt Stilling; “but one *must* trust to chance in all matters. For instance, I must give this letter for London, to the King’s post. There’s a chance of his being stopped on the way. This must be sent to Lady Danvers by a special messenger, who is just as likely to miss her as not. The Duke of Norfolk will be gone from Norwich by this time, and—”

Ralph waved his hand somewhat impatiently. “I wish them to go,” he said.

“There is no chance, at least, of the messenger not reaching London.”

“The greatest in the world,” answered Gaunt Stilling; “but I see, sir, you are not aware of all that is going on. Do you know that the country between this and London is all in a flame? If civil war has not broken out already, it won’t be long first; and depend upon it that no letter will reach London, without being stopped and examined, for this month to come. I haven’t got all the particulars right; but you shall hear more to-morrow morning, for I have friends in Lyme, where this matter first broke out, and I have sent over a boy to enquire.”

“Give me the letters,” said Ralph Woodhall, “and I will decide to-morrow, when we have heard more.”

Thus saying, he took them back, determining, on account of the difficulties Stilling threw in his way, to see them despatched himself. The news of insurrection made

but slight impression upon his mind at the moment, occupied so fully as it was by personal feelings ; but he asked a few questions, in an indifferent tone ; and, receiving nothing but a statement of vague rumours, to which he attached little importance, he retired to bed, resolved to rise early on the following morning, and transact his business for himself.

## CHAPTER VIII.

THE most capricious gift of heaven is sleep.

This is a very bad expression—unphilosophical—not logical ; yet it expresses what I mean, better perhaps than any other form I could have used. A gift cannot be capricious, though the giver may ; and yet, in this instance, the giver is never capricious, and the gift, as if itself instinct with life and will and perversity, seems to have no rule, no regularity, no consistent effect. One is always inclined to repeat or copy the opening of Young's "Night Thoughts," when one



speaks of sleep ; and yet the owl-poet, soft and solemn as he was, did not uniformly direct his flights aright. Sleep does not always “ His ready visit pay where fortune smiles ;” nor does he always “ forsake the wretched, to light on lids unsullied by a tear.” Far, far, from it ! Shakspeare knew the world, waking and sleeping, better than Young ; for sleep does often “ knit up the ravelled sleeve of care,” and bestows his balmy blessing, as the gift of Heaven, upon wearied eye-lids, and aching hearts, and care-worn brains, which nought of earth, earthly, would ever soothe. Ay, and he does so, too, in circumstances where the blessed boon could never be expected ; unless man could calculate finely, and to the utmost nicety, all the varied shades of the heart’s feelings—all the different hues of the mind’s thoughts—all the delicate outlines of the body’s sensations—and balance the harmonies existing through the whole, as in a goldsmith’s scale.

Ralph Woodhall lay down to rest : to

rest, mark me—not to sleep. Sleep he never calculated upon. His mind was as busy and as active when his head touched the pillow, as his body had been during the four or five days preceding. But his body was weary : a dull numbness was in his limbs, an oppressive burden upon his corporeal energies, that weighed them down ; and he thought he could find repose, though not slumber. In a moment, however, came a vacancy of thought—a dead, leaden lapse in mental existence—a space in which intellect and feeling were alike torpid. Suddenly, the mind or the heart—I know not which—woke up, and the body itself was roused by the start of its companions. He raised himself on his arm—gazed wildly round upon the darkness—half remembered, half forgot, where he was—sank slowly back upon his pillow, and slept profoundly.

His sleep was long as well as deep. The morning sun rose, and shone into the room ; the summer birds began their song, and carolled at his window, all unheard ; his

servant came in—gazed at, but would not wake, him—and retired, saying to himself—“Would I could sleep so!” The breakfast table was laid in the small room below; the church clock struck nine, and Ralph was sleeping still.

It was not exhaustion of body; for he was accustomed to hard and robust exercise, often repeated, long continued; but it was exhaustion of body and mind together.

The immortal spirit, bound up in fleshly clay, partakes of the infirmity of its fellowship; and that which, liberated from earth, must necessarily be unconscious of weariness, feels, when linked in the bond of life with dust, a part of the weight which hangs upon its mortal companion.

Both the spirit and body of Ralph Woodhall were now weary—both slept. There was an utter vacancy of all things in that dull, leaden repose. There was no movement—no tossing to and fro—no murmuring of the lips—no dream

—no thought—no feeling—no waking. All was still. The beating of the heart went on—the mere mechanism of life was there : the wheel was not still ; the silver chain was not broken : there was existence without life—without the living life, deprived of which, existence is but a gap in time.

It was nearly ten when he awoke ; but then, the shortened shadow on the floor, the brightness of the sunshine as it streamed through the window, and its warm, yellowish, unempurpled light, showed how long he had slept ; and he proceeded to dress himself in haste.

As he stood by the window at the toilet-table, bestowing no great pains upon his attire, for mind had by this time recovered the full mastery of her mortal ally, he saw a horseman, crossing with speed the open space of the park which lay between the house and a little bridge that spanned the river some half a mile farther up. The man was dressed in the livery

of Lady Danvers, which, as most liveries were in those days, was somewhat gay, if not gaudy; and the horse seemed tired enough to require frequently the whip and spur.

Ralph took no great notice; for his mind was busy within its own peculiar sphere of thought, and sent forth few scouts to take heed of what was passing beyond. He saw the man gallop up to the terrace, and pass round to the back of the house, without even any mental comment. He did not ask who he could be—why he rode so fast—or what intelligence he brought. To him, it was nothing more than that something had arrived at the mansion—that a horse and man had passed rapidly before his eyes, and that they were gone.

He was still absorbed in the thoughts of the preceding day, when a gentle knock at the door roused him; and, turning round, he saw Mr. Drayton entering with some letters in his hand.

“I beg pardon for intruding, sir,” said the steward, with a bow of profound respect; “but a servant has brought some letters from my lady, amongst which is this for yourself, marked—‘With the utmost speed.’ I therefore made bold to break in upon your rest; for your servant told me you were still sleeping.”

“I thank you, Mr. Drayton,” returned Ralph. “I have a good deal overslept myself. What says your lady?”

“But little to me, sir,” replied the steward, “except to give you this letter immediately, and to send the other to Lady Di Fullerton, who often stays here; but I thought this needed immediate notice, and therefore, as I have said, I brought it up.”

Ralph took the letter with more indifference than Mr. Drayton thought altogether proper towards the hand and seal of his fair, influential mistress; and having opened it, read as follows:—

“ I write to you in haste, dear friend ; for, since you left me, I have heard much which requires to be spoken of between you and me immediately. Some mistakes have evidently been committed—where or how, I cannot stop to enquire ; and it is needful, before you take any step whatever, that you should consult with some one, even though it be so humble a counsellor as myself. More dangers surround you than you at all imagine, very different from those which alarmed me on the day you left me, and which have now passed away from my mind. These cannot be explained by letter ; but you must now—I enjoin and require you, by courtesy and gallantry, which I know you possess if you would but show them—to remain a close prisoner in my house till you see me, without doing act or deed which can bring any one to know where you are concealed. I may add, that warrants are out against you for crimes less pardonable than the

mere fighting a duel ; and that you must not be found till the doubts and fears that shake men's minds have passed away. Do not suppose I will keep you long waiting, although I do not choose to commit the facts of which I am cognizant to the peril of a letter ; but I am following you as rapidly as may be ; bold in my independence—and, I trust, right in my purposes. Nevertheless, to escape the world's forked tongue, I have written to an amiable, but antique, cousin, married and widowed, to come over to Danvers Newchurch. Should she arrive before myself, show her all courtesy and kindness ; and believe me, if you will let me be so,

“ Your kind sister,

“ HORTENSIA DANVERS.”

Ralph studied the letter with much attention, read and re-read every sentence



several times, and ultimately resolved to abide by the counsel it contained, and to await the coming of his fair hostess, ere he took any step whatever. It was evident—so he argued—that Lady Danvers was disabused of the idea that he had killed his cousin Henry in a duel ; but the nature of the peril to which she alluded, he could not at all divine.

Could it be, he asked himself, that, in order to secure his vengeance, the influence of Lord Woodhall, who attributed to him his son's death, had been exerted with such effect as to create a factitious accusation that he, Ralph, had committed some other offence against the laws? Such an idea would never occur to any Englishman in the present day ; and the very mention of it would be laughed to scorn. But it must be recollected that this was no vain and improbable fancy in the times of which I am speaking. Trumped-up charges, for the purpose of destroying a political adversary or a private enemy,

had been, for more than twenty years, and still were, as common as daisies. Nor had such villany yet reached its height ; for the three succeeding years displayed an amount of nefarious practices of this kind, which, probably, never before, and certainly never after, stained the history of any Christian country. Courts of law, too, were notoriously corrupt. Judges were bought, sold, and influenced. Scroggs and Jeffreys had dishonored the judgment-seat ; attorneys-general were at the beck and call of every political enmity or court intrigue ; and corrupt sheriffs selected, packed, and instructed the juries of the day, on the basest motives, for the most infamous purposes.

It was no chimera of the imagination, then, that Ralph Woodhall dreaded ; but a real and substantial danger, which might affect any man who had incurred the enmity of power and influence. No great harm could be done, he thought, by delay ; and he determined not to send the letters which he had written on

the preceding evening, till Lady Danvers should arrive.

On questioning the man who had brought her letters, he found that she might be expected in two days ; and, to follow her directions exactly, he took a strong resolution to confine himself to the house, till he should be made more fully aware of the peril that menaced him.

But alas for human resolutions, and for young men's, above all ! Ralph was uneasy and restless. The anxiety of his mind left him no repose. He tried to read ; and the fine library of Danvers Newchurch afforded ample opportunity ; but he soon found that the delight in books was for the time gone. He thought of Margaret, and of his poor cousin Henry, and with a feeling of sympathy and pity for old Lord Woodhall himself. He knew well that the first effect of his son's violent death, would be to produce rage and a thirst for vengeance, which might be turned against any person by the slightest

accident ; but he knew, also, that this would subside, and that profound grief would take the place of anger, and would, very probably, affect the old man's health, if not his intellect.

He paced up and down the room. He gazed forth from the window, full of thought. He tasted very little of the dinner set before him. He looked at his watch often, to see how the dull day went. In fact, to use a vulgar, but significant, expression, he could settle to nothing. At length, as the sun began to go down, he felt that longing for the free open air which is so hard to be resisted. He persuaded himself that no harm could accrue from his wandering out into the park. He would go no farther, he thought ; and, throughout the whole live-long day, he had seen no one but the servants walking to and from the house, or a gamekeeper, with a gun on his shoulder, crossing the wide expanse within the walls ; so that his walk was likely to be solitary and uninterrupted. Resolution soon gave

way under such reasoning ; and out he went, wandering quietly along, and soon losing himself amidst the scattered trees and undulations of the ground.

It is very pleasant to lose oneself sometimes ; to shake off everything habitual ; to be without sight of houses and men, free from the busy scene of mortal coil ; to comrade with Nature, and to see nought but Nature's handiwork around. And Ralph, certainly, had ample opportunity of doing so ; for, quitting the path, and taking his way across the green turf, he was soon out of sight of the house, and wandering on among the old fantastic hawthorns, with the fern waving its plumes up to his knees, and here and there a chesnut, or an oak, spreading its green branches over his head. Every now and then, a rabbit or a hare would dart away from his foot, and cunningly gallop through the tall, concealing fern, marking its course by a long wavy line. A herd of deer, here and there, would stand and gaze at him as he passed, keeping him at

a safe distance, or trotting away with increasing speed if he came suddenly near. A solitary doe, also, started up as he approached her lair amongst the longest leaves, and scampered off in a different direction from the herd ; and Ralph would moralize upon her, somewhat in the vein of Jaques, asking himself what she had done to be thus shut out from fellowship with her kind—what offence she had committed against the laws and proprieties of deer.

All these things were around him, but there was no trace of man. If the scene had ever been embellished by man's hand, the vestiges of his handiwork had passed away, and all seemed Nature's doing. Clouds, too, were flitting over the sky—large, grand, fleecy, summer clouds, low down in the air, and looking like the island of the Laputan sages. Ralph's fancy played with them too. He made flying thrones of them, and winged chariots ; and longed to have some enchanter's spell to call one

down to receive him, that he might float away upon its soft, calm couch, till he could step gently down at Margaret's side.

This pleasant amusement of the mind—this refreshing solitude—had no long time to last. After walking about half a mile through the fern, the wall of the park appeared in sight, and Ralph, turning a little to the left, resolved to follow its course, and regain the house by the other side. He soon, however, heard voices speaking behind the wall, and judged rightly that, beyond it, lay some public road. An instant after, as he looked on, he saw a man leap the wall, at the distance of about a hundred yards farther up the hill, and immediately crouch down amongst the fern and long grass, which was there peculiarly tall. Ralph paused for a moment, to watch what would follow ; and, standing under an old chesnut tree, could see without being seen. Runningfeet were heard immediately after ; and then the head and shoulders of another man appeared above the wall. After gazing

quickly round, the last comer exclaimed—

“He has run on—he has run on! He must either have taken down, over the bridge, or amongst the cottages by old mother Diamond’s.”

Thus saying, he let go his hold of the wall, and disappeared; and Ralph could hear the sound of many persons running fast, and calling to each other as they went. His curiosity was excited by the scene he had witnessed; and he connected it in his own mind with some vague information, which Gaunt Stilling had brought him in the morning, of a rising on the sea-board of Dorsetshire, which Ralph had judged, from the man’s account, to be of no greater importance than a riot in a country town. He walked straightforward, then, towards the spot where the man who had leaped the wall lay concealed; and had approached very near, when the stranger started upon his feet with a large horse-pistol in his hand, and warned him to stand back.



"I will not be taken by a single man," he said, "I will die first with arms in my hand."

"I do not seek to take you, my good friend," returned Ralph, in a calm tone. "I have no commission for such a thing. But you had better put up your pistol; for if you should be foolish enough to fire, it would bring back to the spot those who, apparently, are seeking you, as well as servants and game-keepers enough to render your other arms useless."

"Then, will you swear not to touch me, if I do put it up—not to attempt to take me, I mean?" interrogated the stranger, after having eyed him attentively for a moment.

"I will give you my honour," replied Ralph; "and that must satisfy you. But I should much like to know, if you please, what you are doing here within the walls of this park, where I imagine you have no business, and where you are exceedingly likely to be apprehended as a deer-stealer."

“ I am the most unfortunate of men,” cried the other ; “ and have only escaped one peril to fall into another. Sir, I assure you I came not to steal your deer, but merely to escape from those blood-hounds of a tyrant, who are following me to the death.”

Lamentable as was his reply, something almost ludicrous sounded in the tone in which it was delivered ; and Ralph smiled slightly, as he rejoined—“ The deer are not mine, my good friend, nor am I the proprietor of this park, but merely a guest at the house.”

He was going on, when the other interrupted him with a theatrical gesture, saying—“ Then I beseech you, sir, if you have any generosity or chivalry in your disposition, aid an unfortunate stranger who is only persecuted on account of his political and religious opinions. I have committed no crime. They can charge me with no other fault than that of hating tyranny and popery.”

“ If that be all your offence,” replied Ralph, “ many a man in the land would be chargeable with the same, and myself amongst the rest. But I really know not how to serve you, unless it be by leading you to a way out of the park, in a different direction from that which your pursuers have taken. I saw a gate, a few minutes ago, up the stream. The men have gone down below, towards the bridge, and will very likely search the park, when they find themselves disappointed there. You had better follow me, therefore, as fast as possible, in order to have a fair start.”

“ Without delay, without delay !” exclaimed the stranger, waving his hand in what he conceived a very graceful manner ; and, pursuing his course onward by the wall, Ralph conducted him towards a gate of the park which was visible from the house. As they went, the stranger, who seemed rather given to babbling, entered into more conversation than Ralph, perhaps, desired. Nor was

the style exactly suited to compensate for the defects of the manner. His language was a mixture of bad French and somewhat vulgar English, with the assistance, every now and then, of a word or two of low Dutch ; and in this jargon he went on to inform Ralph of a variety of particulars, which, had our young friend's loyalty been very rampant, might have induced him to cause his arrest on the spot. He boasted that a fortnight could not pass before the crown of England would be upon the head of a good, true, Protestant King ; that the whole land was rising in favour of the legitimate heir to the throne ; and that the army itself was full of disaffection to the reigning monarch.

Ralph stopped him as soon as he could, half inclined to believe he was insane, and anxious to get rid of him as quickly as possible ; but, before they reached the gate towards which their steps were directed, they were encountered by a game-keeper, who stopped full in their

way, looking at them both sternly as they approached.

Suddenly, however, the man's face changed, and he exclaimed, with a laugh, "Ah, Tom Dare! when did you come back from beyond sea? I thought you could not venture. Why, do you know, man, you are proclaimed, and all the lads of Taunton are looking for you?"

Tom Dare, as the keeper called him, had, at first, shrunk into himself in evident consternation; but the last words seemed to rouse him, and, resuming his high-flown style, he answered, "They shall soon find me, for I am going there *tout droit*."

"But who is this gentleman?" asked the keeper, looking at Ralph with some degree of suspicion, and addressing his question to the man he called Tom Dare.

Ralph, however, took upon himself to answer, saying, "I am a guest of Lady Danvers, my friend; and, finding this person in the park, I undertook to shew him the way to the gate."

“ Oh, sir, you are the gentleman staying at the house ?” said the keeper, doffing his hat. “ As to Tommy Dare here, the sooner he is out of the park the better ; indeed, I don’t know what he does here at all.”

To this uncivil speech, Mr. Dare only replied by a rueful shake of the head, and by some muttered words in regard to a certain lady of Babylon, who has a very unpleasant reputation. In the meantime, however, he sped on ; the game-keeper turning in the direction of the gate also, as if to see him out of the park. An air of doubt and hesitation was about the keeper’s face ; and once or twice he muttered to himself, “ I don’t know—I’m not sure, but I ought—yet, hang it ! one’s own townsman !—No, no ; I can’t do it.”

As soon as they came in sight of the gate at the upper part of the park, both Ralph and the keeper stopped, and the latter said, “ There’s the gate, Master Dare, and I’ll give you a word of advice. Take care of your neck if you get to Taunton. I don’t believe you’ll find the

folks bide any nonsense there, especially when riots are going on in the country."

Mr. Dare, who was a step or two in advance, waved his hand solemnly, and Ralph thought he could hear the word, "Fool!" ejaculated in a low tone. He hurried on, however, and passed the gates, when Ralph turned back with the game-keeper on his way to the house.

"Who is that man?" he asked, as they proceeded.

"He is a bad fellow, sir," replied the game-keeper, abruptly. His name is Thomas Dare, who, at one time, had a little money in Taunton, my native town; but he could not keep himself quiet, for he was a great talker and orator, as they called him, and got a number of folks into a scrape in the last King's reign, then left them to shift for themselves, and ran away to Holland. I am not at all sure that I ought not, by rights, to have apprehended him; for he is a proclaimed outlaw, and is here for no good, depend upon it."

Ralph did not make any comment, but strolled back again towards the house, feeling a little dissatisfied at himself for not having adhered to his resolution of the morning. The sun was setting when he reached the door, purpling the slopes of the park, and making the river glow like a ruby.

Another day had passed ; and, as he stood there and looked round for a moment, Ralph could not help thinking how different was the scene, and the spot, and the circumstances, which had characterized that day, from anything he could have anticipated a few weeks before.



## CHAPTER IX.

THE mansion of Danvers Newchurch, when Ralph entered it, seemed silent and solitary enough. It was too large for a small household, such as now tenanted it. The steward's apartments were far away ; the rooms of the inferior servants still farther distant ; and, entering the small saloon in which he had passed the morning, Ralph felt as if he were the only inhabitant of the house. The evening gleam, now tinged with the grey of night, shone in at the window ; the paintings on the walls had become dim and indistinct ; shade after shade fell with melancholy descent over the sky ; and the ticking of a clock on

the stairs would have been the only sound to break the stillness, had not the note of a distant blackbird, singing beneath a bush, intruded on the calm air of evening. Ralph felt his spirits depressed, and was not sorry when one of the old servants entered the room, bearing letters in his hand.

“This is for you, sir, I suppose,” he said. “Harry has just brought it back from Lady Di. Fullerton, with this other for my lady, against her return.”

Ralph took the letter which the man handed to him—a small, delicate note, perfumed and sealed; but it was too dark by this time even to read the address, and he had to wait till lights were brought. When they had been set upon the table, he bade the man send his servant to him.

“He borrowed a horse from Mr. Drayton, sir,” replied the domestic, “and rode away about twelve o’clock. He has not come back yet, I believe.”

“I remember, I remember,” said Ralph. “He asked leave to go and see some of his friends.”

Then, turning to the note, he examined the superscription, viz.

“To the Honourable Gentleman at present residing at Danvers Newchurch.”

Within, were written a few complimentary lines in the French language, expressing the regret of Lady Diana Fullerton, that she could not have the extreme pleasure of doing the honours of her relative's house to Lady Danvers's guest, as she had been for some time too seriously unwell to venture out of her own dressing-room. Plenty of polite and courtly expressions were employed ; but the main fact was, that no chance appeared of Lady Di. Fullerton being able to give her society and countenance to Hortensia, during Ralph's stay at Danvers Newchurch.

To say truth, Ralph did not very much embarrass himself with reflections upon this derangement of Lady Danvers's plans.

He was young and inexperienced in society ; and a college life of those days was not at all likely to open the eyes of a young man to the proprieties of the world. He saw no more reason why he should not stay in the same house with Hortensia, than stay in the same street ; and it must be remembered, also, that that horrible cloak of decorum, which, like charity, but too frequently covers a multitude of sins, was a thing hardly known in those days, when the frenzied license of the Restoration was only just giving place to the colder and more covert debaucheries which succeeded. He quietly tore to pieces Lady Diana Fullerton's note, with very little reverence ; and, casting the subject from his mind, let his thoughts rest, with some of that impatience for action peculiar to youth, upon the death of his poor cousin Henry, and the anguish which he knew Margaret must be feeling, both for her brother and for himself, if she believed him guilty. He longed to fly to her, to

console her, to comfort her, to assure her of his innocence and of his ever-enduring affection ; but how rarely is it that Fate allows us to do anything that we long to do ! Had not the warning of Lady Danvers kept him in inactivity, he would not have dared either to visit or to write to, her whom he so much loved. He did not know if their attachment to each other had been really made known or not ; for, although he had at first attributed the anxiety of the Duke of Norfolk and Hortensia, about removing him from the vicinity of Lord Woodhall, to a discovery which he knew would excite the old lord's highest indignation, even without any of those insinuations which Robert Woodhall was too likely to add, yet that anxiety was now explained in another manner ; and his and Margaret's mutual love might be still unknown, and their happiness be perilled by any indiscreet act.

Thought, so rapid in itself that it can girdle the great earth, "ere the leviathan

can swim a league," nevertheless makes time often pass rapidly along with it. The evening wore away insensibly, broken only by one solitary ramble through the galleries and rooms which he had visited the night before. That ramble, indeed, occupied some time, because many of the pictures interested him ; and more than once, he stood with the light in his hand, gazing at the face of departed greatness or beauty, and comparing what he knew, from history and poetry, of the life now ended, with the permanent expression of the countenance, as represented by the painter.

It has always given me a strange sensation to go through an ancient portrait-gallery, and see the faces of the dead looking down at me from the wall—living again, as it were, in the spiritual world of art. Their acts may be recorded on the pages of history—their thoughts, their words, transmitted to us, even in their own hands; but those are mere voices—vague shadows of a name. It is only the hand of the painter, or of the sculptor, that can

give us the definite and the clear. On the broad brow, in the liquid eye, in the curl of the lip, in the dimpled cheek, in the poise of the figure, in the very fall of the hand, we read more of the character of human beings, than in all they have written or all they have done. Men write for the world, and often act for the world. Circumstances control them—events rule them. Few, if any, are not, at some time, if not at all times, acting a part ; and, even where passion has spurned all governance, and the fiery deed of love or hate has seemed in its bright glare to reveal the very inner secrets of the heart, still, no one can tell how that heart may have been affected by events of which we know nothing—how many motives, sensations, feelings, passions, accidents, may not have prompted and mingled with the deeds which we only see in their harsh whole. But upon the face and form, we are fond of thinking that Nature has herself written the description of her handiwork. There,

with some experience and very little skill, by indications as small as the letters of a book, we can read much of the mind, the heart, the character, which no other page can display ; and, at the same time, the likeness of the fleshly tabernacle of the spirit stands before us ; so that all that can be known of the mixed being, is at once in presence.

Oh great Lavater ! every one is, more or less, a physiognomist.

Ralph gazed, then, upon those faces, with association very busy in his mind ; or, again, he would pause before a sunny landscape, and let the eye rest upon the golden skies, or wander through the far extended vales, or, pausing amongst the deep groves of trees, watch the nymphs bathing in the limpid stream, or the ancient armament sailing up, amidst columns, and trophies, and palaces, to an imagined city. The poetry of painting would wake in his heart as many bright images as ever were called up by verse or lyre.



Again, he would go on ; and, feeling free in the solitude, he ventured once more into Hortensia's own apartments. But this time he got no farther than her picture. It had, certainly, something fascinating in it. He stood and gazed upon that bright face, bursting through the branches in its wild, gay youth, and comparing it, line by line, with the features which memory preserved ; and, as he did so, imagination was busy too. He asked himself what were the events, what the course of life, which had subdued and chastened the light hilarity there displayed — what was it that, like Ondine's love, had given a soul to the wild spirit sparkling there ? He did not puzzle, though he did not satisfy himself : he enjoyed the wanderings of his own imagination round that pleasant theme ; and when, at length, he turned away to retire to rest, he said to himself,

“ She must always have been very lovely.”

Let us not ask, if Hortensia shared his

dreams with Margaret. We have no right to lift up Sleep's shadowy curtain, and see the fairy sports of fancies freed from the control of will and reason. He slept, and doubtless he dreamed too ; but he woke early, ere the sun had so far climbed the eastern hill as to overtop the wood, and the slant rays were still pouring in golden splendour through the branches of the trees.

As he paused to look through the open window, after having dressed himself, his eye passed over the park to the valley beyond ; and, where the open ground stretched out from the banks of the stream up the sides of the hills, he was surprised to see a number of horsemen, in groups of two or three together, cantering lightly hither and thither as if in sport. It was no season for hunting ; but he thought that, perhaps, they might be flying a hawk ; and he watched them with some interest, till he convinced himself that that supposition was incorrect.

A moment after, he saw a single figure riding up the broad road from the great gates to the house ; and, as it came nearer, he recognized his servant, Gaunt Stilling, who had been absent since noon of the day before.

“ Perhaps he brings me some intelligence,” thought Ralph, as he descended to the small saloon, where his breakfast was laid. Gaunt Stilling, however, did not come ; and, at length, after having waited ample time for him to tend his horse, his young master sent for him.

When he appeared, Ralph was a good deal struck with something strange in the man’s looks. He seemed worn, fatigued, and thin, and his apparel was dusty with the road ; but that was not all. He was gloomy, abstracted, and more taciturn than usual. Even in the midst of a sentence, he would fix his eyes on the ground, and seemingly fall into a deep reverie.

“ Do you know who those horsemen are, whom I saw just now, riding down in the

valley?" asked Ralph, after a few other questions of no moment.

"No, sir," replied Stilling. "I saw them, but did not heed them."

"They seemed at one time to be hawking," said Ralph. "Have you heard any farther intelligence from Lyme?"

"None, sir," answered the servant; "I have been forty miles the other way. I met that scoundrel, Thomas Dare, this morning, who might have told me, perhaps; but—" And he left the sentence unconcluded, remaining, as it were, lost in thought.

"But what?" asked his master.

The man started, and looked up. "Oh, merely that I was busy with other thoughts, sir,—that the man is a rascal,—and that we passed each other with only, 'Give you good day, Master Stilling'—'Go to the devil, Thomas Dare.'"

Something had evidently gone wrong with Stilling; but, as he did not seem inclined to speak of it, Ralph, though he felt

interested, merely said, "I hope you had good news of your family, Stilling?"

"The worst in the world," replied the man, abruptly. "I thought the worst had come some time ago, yet this is worse; but, so help me heaven—" Again he broke off his speech, and relapsed into silence. This time, however, his silence was not without significance; for he clenched both hands tight, as if struggling with strong passion.

"I am very sorry to hear this," observed Ralph, in a feeling tone. "Can I do anything to assist you, Stilling? I need not tell you I am most ready, if it be possible."

The man looked up more brightly, and replied, "Not at present, sir; but the time may come—Hark! there is Lady Danvers, I suppose. I heard of her on the road."

The sounds which had attracted his attention, were produced by horses' feet on the gravel; and, the moment after, the

great bell rang out loud. Without taking note of the fact that no sound had been heard of carriage-wheels, Ralph rose hastily, and ran through the hall to the door, in order to assist his beautiful hostess as she alighted. He was surprised to see, however, when he opened the door, a party of some ten or twelve horsemen, three of whom had dismounted, while another, far taller, and much handsomer than any of the rest, was in the act of alighting also. One groom held his horse, another supported his stirrup ; and something dignified and graceful was in his whole air, which instantly attracted Ralph's chief attention towards him. He wore a star and broad ribbon, and, on his heavy riding-boots, a pair of golden spurs. His whole dress was splendid, though subdued in colouring by good taste.

Before any questions could be asked, the steward, and two or three of the old servants, were by Ralph's side ; and, finding that he had been mistaken in his expecta-

tions, the young gentleman retired into the house, leaving Mr. Drayton to reply to any enquiries. He heard a fine, melodious voice, however, ask if Lady Danvers were then in Dorsetshire, to which Mr. Drayton replied in the negative.

“I have a letter for her from an old friend,” said the stranger; “and would wish to add a few lines myself, if you will furnish me with materials for writing. Nay, more; I am inclined to tax your hospitality so far, sir, as to ask for some refreshment for my men and horses, and some breakfast for myself.—You know me I presume?”

“I do, your Grace,” replied Mr. Drayton; “and, of course, whatever the house affords is at your service.”

“Well then, I will walk in here, and write,” said the other, advancing towards the room in which Ralph was then seated.

Mr. Drayton seemed puzzled how to act; but, before he could decide, the stranger had entered the room, and stood face

to face with Ralph Woodhall, He bowed courteously, but with a look of some surprise ; and the good steward thought fit to take upon himself the task of introducing Ralph, as “ Mr. Woodhall, a friend of my Lady’s family, sir, who is staying for a time at the house.”

He did not mention the name of the new visitor ; but, while he hurried away to procure pen, ink, and paper, the gentleman seated himself calmly at the table, and entered easily into conversation. His very appearance was a recommendation, and his demeanour was so graceful that, even had his conversation been less happy than it was, an irresistible charm would still have been about it ; but his words were well chosen ; his expressions, what I may call picturesque, if not poetical ; and there was a touch of that vivacity which often passed for wit at the Court of the Second Charles. He asked a number of questions ; but none of them impertinent or intrusive. He spoke of the



house, and the grounds, and the beauty of the park ; said he had been there when he was a boy, but had nearly forgotten them ; and expressed a wish to walk over the mansion, before he went.

“ I shall have much pleasure in conducting you, sir,” said Ralph ; “ for, during the short time of my stay here, I have more than once wandered over the building, and felt much interest in all that it contains.”

“ Then you are not well acquainted with the place ?” said the other ; but, without waiting for a reply to what was in reality a question, he added, “ Let us go. Doubtless they will be a long while in bringing pen, ink, and paper. I have always found it so, here in Dorsetshire, since my return.”

They walked out into the hall together, where two or three gentlemen stood booted and spurred. These uncovered their heads, as soon as Ralph’s companion appeared, and one of them, advancing a step, addressed him, saying, “ It is all clear, your Grace, on

the way to Taunton, and the intelligence in that quarter, is satisfactory."

"Good," returned the other. "This want of cavalry is inconvenient. What says Mr. Dare, as to the levies about Taunton?"

"He had not yet reached the town, my Lord Duke, when his messenger came away," was the reply; "but he promises much—more, I fear, than he will perform; for his reception in some of the small villages by the way, has been so good, that he looks upon it as conquered country already. He is a braggadocio, if ever there was one."

"He is a good creature, notwithstanding," said the Duke; "light and gay in danger, and cheerful in all circumstances—a little given to boast and assume, perhaps; but still, his gaiety and confidence throw a light upon our expedition, which I wish other things also would afford."

"Shall I give any orders regarding the

march to-morrow?" enquired the other gentleman.

"I think not," replied Ralph's companion. "We must wait for these Taunton levies, or some surer information. It will not do to leave all resources behind us, till we have the certainty of support in advance. But make yourself easy, gallant friend. Time, I trust, will be our ally, and not our enemy."

Something uncommonly easy, though rather desponding, was in the speaker's tone and manner; and Ralph, though he guessed at first that he was speaking with the Duke of Monmouth, began to doubt whether his supposition was correct; for he had not calculated accurately how far adversity can tame both the highest and the lightest spirits.

After this brief conversation, they passed on through the house, speaking calmly and cheerfully of the various objects which it presented to their eyes, as if there were no such thing as strife, and warfare, and blood-

shed in the world. The Duke walked the long suites of splendid rooms, and the extended lines of corridors, as if he were treading the drawing-rooms of some peaceful palace, with a calm sort of meditative gentleness, not unmixed with dignity, which beseemed him well. In his whole demeanour, carriage, and appearance, he was every inch a prince ; and the very slight reference made by him to political topics, seemed to Ralph a recommendation of his cause. He appeared as calmly confident of his rights, as if nothing more were required than to show himself, to win all hearts in his support. Had he maintained this tranquil trust, he would have been a greater, a happier, perhaps a more successful, man.

The Duke asked some questions, however, tending to elicit his young companion's opinions ; and, finding him a staunch Protestant, though of the Episcopal Church, and a strong enemy of all tyranny, civil or religious, he ventured by degrees

to allude distantly to his own enterprise, and to hint—without asking it—that the assistance of every gallant gentleman was an object he desired.

Ralph was silent, from many varied motives. He gave neither encouragement nor the reverse, judging more sanely than the Duke, of the circumstances which surrounded him; and entertaining many doubts whether, if Monmouth, by one of those strange accidents which sometimes influence the course of great events, should succeed in dethroning James, his own elevation to sovereignty would be acceptable to the great body of the people of the realm. He knew moreover that in the hearts of Englishmen there is a fund of steady, determined loyalty, an hereditary love for an ancient line of kings, which requires the insanity of great oppression to be shaken or overthrown.

The Duke of Monmouth did not press

the subject by any means far, seeming to feel it beneath him to canvas for the aid of any individual. He might know, too, that much eagerness displays small confidence ; and, at this moment of his career, it was a part of Monmouth's policy to appear assured of success.

After commenting, in the tone of a connoisseur, upon some of the pictures, and of a gay courtier upon others, he returned to the small room below ; and, finding writing materials ready, sat down and wrote a few lines on a sheet of paper, in which he enclosed another letter he had brought with him. He sealed, and then addressed the whole to Hortensia, Baroness Danvers ; when, placing it in Ralph's hand, he said, with a gay smile, " I will trust this to your good care, for speedy delivery, sir. If you be a lover, it comes from no rival : if you be a friend, it comes from a friend no less sincere : if you be a relation, there are lines within it which come from one who

has loved the person addressed, as sincerely as any relative could love.—Nay, my good sir,” he continued, turning to Mr. Drayton, who entered, followed by several servants bearing food in a rich service of plate ; “you treat my humble state too royally ; but the time may come, when I can acknowledge your courtesy better.—Mr. Woodhall, will you partake ?”

The Duke’s breakfast was not half concluded, when one of his followers came in suddenly and without ceremony, and spoke a word to Monmouth, in a low tone, over the back of his chair.

The Duke started up, and gazed at him for an instant with a look of horror and consternation.

“What ?” he exclaimed, “what did you say ? Shot Thomas Dare—in the streets of Lyme—on a dispute about a horse !”

“Too true, indeed, your Grace,” replied the other. “Shot him dead. The ball passed through his brain.”

“By the Lord that lives,” cried Mon-

mouth, "these turbulent men shall find that he who claims to rule a realm like this, can, at least, rule a handful who pretend to obey ! Have out the horses there ! I must not lose a moment."

Ever energetic, and often right in purpose, Monmouth hurried to depart, only to shew how weak he could be in act, how amenable to the weak counsels of others. Brave as a lion in the field, ever timid in the council—not without skill as the general, ever misled as the politician and the man.

As, about to mount his horse, he turned away from the door, he looked round to Ralph with a pleasant smile, saying, "Remember my commission. I trust to you."

"I will not fail, your Grace," replied Ralph.

They were few and simple words, but their effects were important.



## CHAPTER X.

“ Ah, poor gentleman !” said Mr. Drayton, as the cavalcade passed quickly down the tortuous road through the park towards the gate ; “ I remember the time well when he went through the western counties in a sort of triumph ; when men and maidens turned out of every village and every town to meet him ; when his horse’s feet trod upon nothing but flowers, and the ringing of bells kept all the country in a noise. He was feasted at Langleet, met by all the gentry of the land, and harangued by every corporation. The people made an idol of him, and the great men

could not show him too much honor. I fear he will find it different now."

"Do you think, then, the people have lost their love for him?" demanded Ralph, anxious to hear more of events which were passing so near, without any certainty reaching his ears.

"Not a whit, sir," answered the steward; "not a whit, if you mean the common people. They are more constant than gentlemen think. Why, they are flocking into Lyme in thousands, I am told. But with the gentry it is different. They courted him for interest—at least one half of them—and now, for interest, they will keep aloof. The Tories will stick by the crown, right or wrong; and Whig gentlemen have a great notion of looking well before they leap. I would take any fair bet that the good Duke will not find five men above the rank of a yeoman to join him before he fights a battle and wins it, if ever that should happen."

Ralph made no reply, although he

doubted not that Mr. Drayton's anticipations were too true. He enquired, indeed, what was taking place in the country round; but the rumours—which were all that the steward could relate—were, as is always the case on such occasions, confused and various; and, after a time, Ralph begged the worthy man to send him his servant Stilling, in order to renew the conversation which had been broken off by Monmouth's arrival.

Mr. Drayton seemed to hesitate for an instant, and then said frankly, "I think you had better let him alone, sir, just at present. Something has gone very wrong with him—that is clear. I saw him, a minute or two ago, walking up and down the stable-yard, and pinching his hands one in the other, as if he would have screwed the blood out of his fingers' points. Poor fellow! I remember him a gay, blithesome lad in an attorney's office at Dorchester. A good education had Gaunt Stilling; but then the old lady got him a commission in

the Tangier regiment, and he went away. He's mightily changed now, and yet he can't be much over thirty."

"So much?" asked Ralph, in a tone of surprise. "But tell me, Master Drayton—do you know anything of the cause of his present distress of mind? You seem to be well acquainted with his family."

"I have known them many years, sir," replied the steward, with a grave face. "As to what is the matter now—I don't exactly know anything. The carrier brought over word, some three weeks ago, that his sister had been sent away from Lincolnshire by the old man, to get her from a young gentleman who wished to wrong her. The father brought her half the way, and her uncle went the other half, to meet her. Now I fancy Gaunt has been over to see her. It's a bad business I'm, afraid; and the gentleman's name they talk of, was the same as yours, sir."

As he spoke, he fixed his eyes with an enquiring look upon Ralph's face; and

the latter felt himself reddened as he recollected all he had seen and heard at Coldenham. He fancied, too, that some suspicion was in the steward's eyes ; and he hastened to reply —

“Not mine exactly, sir ; for there is no other living, of the name of Ralph Woodhall, that I know ; and I never saw poor Stilling's sister but once, and then only for a moment.”

He spoke somewhat sharply, and Drayton replied in an apologetic tone, saying, “I beg pardon, sir. I did not at all mean that you were the gentleman—indeed, I knew you were not ; but I thought it might be some relation.

“Possibly,” observed Ralph, not quite satisfied yet. “I know nothing of this matter, however ; for, with the exception of the poor cousin whom I have lately lost, and his father, I have been on no terms of intimacy with any of my male relations.”

“They are of high rank, sir, I believe?” rejoined the steward, in a tone of enquiry ;

but Ralph merely bowed his head, thinking it not necessary to enter into any part of his family history with a mere stranger.

After a moment's pause, he said, "I will take your advice, Mr. Drayton, and leave poor Gaunt Stilling alone for a time ; but I think it would be as well to divert his thoughts, after a short period, from painful subjects of contemplation. I wish therefore that, without my sending for him, you would let him know that I wish him to go out in the afternoon, and ascertain what is doing in the country. Tell him that I desire very precise and accurate information as to the movements of the Duke of Monmouth's forces, and those of the King ; for it cannot be supposed that a large body in actual rebellion will be suffered much longer to move about the country unopposed."

"I don't know, sir," answered Mr. Drayton, shaking his head. "Sometimes governments are taken napping ; and I think the only chance for the good Duke

would be to push on upon London at once. Bold councils would bring many a man to his standard ; for there is something catching in boldness as well as in fear. I doubt, however, whether Stilling will learn much ; for I have men all around, who would bring me any tidings that were to be got, and they bring me nothing certain."

" I should wish him to go, nevertheless," said Ralph. " It would serve to occupy his mind, and may, perhaps, furnish us with information even more valuable to your lady than to myself."

The steward bowed and withdrew ; and, for an hour or two, Ralph amused himself as best he might. To have seen him, one would have supposed him of as idle a nature as ever existed. He opened no books. He had no inclination or application to read. He now looked at no pictures, for his mind had harder realities to deal with than those which any canvas can display. The greater part of his time was passed in gazing from the windows upon the wide, wavy scene

without, which afforded, as it were, a stage sufficiently extensive and ample for all persons of the drama of fancy to play their several parts before his eyes. Oh, how memory and imagination conjured up from the depths of the past, from the depths of the future, incidents and characters which might bear their share in the tragedy soon to be performed! A gloomy anticipation, a dark, but too true, shadowing forth of the stern, terrible acts that were about to take place, visited the young man's mind; and he felt that sensation of awe, and sublime and dreadful expectation, which is experienced by the spectator viewing from a height the thunder-cloud marching onward across a sunny land, soon to be left desolate, or the tempest riding over a calm sea, and piling up the glassy waters into surges full of shipwreck and of death.

The minutes glided by almost unnoted; and then, seating himself again at a table, a strange fancy seized him of writing down the thoughts of the moment—the reflec-



tions, the anticipations, which rose one by one, as he considered the circumstances surrounding him.

It was a dangerous amusement. Written thoughts as undigested—as carelessly recorded—as immaturely gathered—as inconsequent and undirected—aided not a little in the last reign to bring the head of the gallant Sidney to the scaffold. Yet the impulse was upon Ralph, and he did not even strive to resist it; but sat, and thought, and wrote, and thought, and wrote again.

The day had declined, and evening was not far off, when Gaunt Stilling entered the room abruptly, saying—

“There has been a bit of a battle, sir, at Bridport, and the Duke’s troops have been repulsed. It was ploughman against ploughman; and the Duke’s ploughmen would have won the day, if Lord Grey and his horse had not ran at the first fire.”

“Who is Lord Grey?” asked Ralph, in a quiet tone.

“Oh, the Duke’s General of Horse,” answered Stilling, with a laugh. “A gentleman very bold in words, and brave enough, they say, in presence of a hangman or a judge; but he does not like the nasty smell of gunpowder, and eschews push of pike.”

“Have you any other tidings?” enquired his master.

“Oh yes, plenty,” responded Stilling. “The Duke of Albemarle—who is more, by the way, of a *Monk* even than his father—is marching to attack Monmouth with the militia. He will be beaten, of course; for where Monmouth is in person, the people will fight like wolves, and he is no bad general either. That will be a feather in his cap, and may bring some people in. But then Feversham is marching down with three or four regular regiments—my old comrades among the rest. Now, Monmouth is worth twenty Frenchmen, and Feversham is only fit for a Court supper; but then there is Churchill, with the Blues,

already in the field ; and he will give the good Duke some trouble, or I mistake my man.—But I forgot to tell you, sir, that my Lady Danvers was coming down the hill as I passed ; and she will be up here in a minute or two ; for they were going at a great rate, not liking, I suspect, the sounds of war that were whizzing all round them.”

“ Indeed ! ” exclaimed Ralph, starting up eagerly. “ I will go to meet her. She comes by the western gates, I suppose ? ”

“ Oh yes, sir, by the west,” replied Gaunt Stilling, gazing after his master as he hurried towards the door ; and then, as Ralph disappeared, the man muttered between his teeth,

“ Fickle—fickle, like all the rest ! What matters it what falls upon him ? They are all alike. The lady has captivated his eye, and little cares he how many hearts he breaks. Ah, what a cursed thing it is to be a gentleman ! and what fools those

are who strive to rise above humble station, to be a prey to the next bigger beast than themselves!"

In the meanwhile, without hearing his servant's comments, Ralph had snatched up his hat, which lay in the passage, and hurried down the walks towards the great gates. The little cavalcade was already in sight, consisting of a great, lumbering vehicle, and some horsemen who accompanied and followed it. It were vain to say that Ralph did not behold it joyfully, or that the coming of Hortensia was not pleasant to him. At the very lowest estimate, it was an agreeable relief to the dull monotony of the life he had been leading. But then there was much more : her grace, her beauty, the charm of her manner and her conversation, shed a light around, like that of sunshine, which brings out the beauty even of the dullest scenes, when it can reach and enrich them with its varying splendour. With her, too, he could con-

sult, confer, and determine ; and action, which seemed to him like life, promised to commence with her coming.

With well-pleased looks, then, he hurried on, and met the carriage half way through the park. He did not approach unmarked ; for, whether she expected him or not, Hortensia saw him afar, and bade the coachman stop. When he came near, she alighted, looking, as he thought, more beautiful than ever ; and, placing her hand within his arm, directed the rest to go on, saying she would walk up to the house. A sweet, tender placidity was in her look—a gently-moved calmness, which was very lovely in itself ; and, as she leaned upon Ralph's arm, while the servants hurried on, obeying with due discretion the orders they had received, she looked up in her young companion's face as if to see how much he had suffered—what ravages thought and sorrow had effected in his appearance since they parted.

Her first question, however, referred to

things very different from the subject which was uppermost in her mind.

"I hope," she said, "that my cousin Lady Di. Fullerton has taken good care of you, Ralph. I have been a sad weary time upon the journey ; but coaches move slowly."

"I doubt not, dear Lady Danvers," replied Ralph, with a smile, "that Lady Diana would have taken good care of me, had she been here ; but—"

"Is she *not* here ?" interrupted Hortensia, in an eager tone, with the blood suddenly rushing up into her cheek, more from surprise, and the sudden pressure of many strange considerations in her mind, than from any great disappointment or annoyance. "Why did she not come ? She must have received my letter."

"She was too ill to come," replied Ralph. "But I fear my stay may be inconvenient to you—perhaps not quite right. There can be no harm or danger in my going forward at once on my way."

"Ralph !" exclaimed Hortensia, in a

slightly reproachful tone, "you do not think me so weak—so foolish. Surely, if my good name be so frail a thing as not to bear the giving shelter, in an hour of danger, to the son of my mother's dearest friend, it is little worth the keeping. You stay, Ralph—you stay, if you have any regard for me. No, no, it matters not. I asked my good cousin out of deference to the cold world's opinion. Having done that, I have done enough."

Well may prophets, and, by their tongues, the great Creator of the human heart, declare that the heart is the most deceitful of all things; for any one who has ever rendered the secrets of the dark, mysterious cavern of his own bosom objective to the analysis of reason, must have recoiled from the scrutiny, deterred by the fearful complications which the eye, at one glance, can perceive.

How far, and how far willingly, Lady Danvers was deceiving herself, it is hardly necessary to enquire. It is quite unneces-

sary, and would be useless, to attempt to trace all the tortuous and darkening passages by which the deception crept along. Certain it is, however, that she *had* persuaded herself that the son of her mother's dearest friend—of her adopted sister—stood towards her almost in the relation of a brother ; that she could not do too much for him ; that she could do nothing, within the bounds of modesty and honour, that was not justifiable and justified in the bright, clear, piercing eye of Heaven. Strong in the rectitude and purity of her own purpose, she cared little for the dull, dark, earthly eye of the world ; but she little recollected that there was a misty, shadowy land, between the pellucid above, and the coarseness below, where the phantasms of associations hovered betwixt the two, ever beheld from the one realm, and sometimes too clearly displayed to the other. She did not ask herself—she did not venture to ask herself—what personal feelings, what mortal affections, were stealing in, and min-



gling unperceived with the calm, unselfish, soulful memories which had first drawn her attention to Ralph Woodhall. She knew not—she would not know—that any difference whatever existed in her feelings towards him, as they walked there, in her own park, side by side, from those with which she had at first beheld him at the Duke of Norfolk's house, a stranger in all but memories. She loved to call him to herself—to think of him in her own mind—as her brother Ralph.

Oh, cunning heart, how skilful art thou even in snatching the artifice of indistinct words, to veil thy workings from the deceived eye of thy master! Hortensia would not now, for the world, have called her companion “Mr. Woodhall.” It would have broken the spell—destroyed the illusion. He would have been no longer her brother, but her lover—or him whom she loved. The very thought that her heart could be so far given, as it really was, to one who had never sought or asked it,

would have been death to her ; for, with all the warm tenderness of her feelings, the deep, strong, enthusiastic tone of her affections, she had every quality of a true woman—that nearest approach to the angel that this latter world has ever seen.

Let the cold argue against such things—let the worldly. Argue ye, bound up, moulded, fettered in the strong conventionalities of a false and factitious state—ye, who are tutored, from the nursery to the altar, to bend your wills and crush your hearts before the great world's god, Convenience. In the age, of which I write, corrupt and debased as it was—one of the worst that earth has ever seen—in the reaction, and rebellion of man's heart and soul, against the iron tyranny of a cold and false fanaticism, there were glorious instances of pure and true devotion—of strong and deep affection—of passion above license—of morality beyond decorum—which are rarely seen now, when the fire of fanaticism is extinguished, and the rigid rules of a cynical

religion have been superseded by the gilded but unsubstantial fetters of an eye-serving propriety. Nay, more ; the most licentious chronicler of the scandals of that age, the witty scoffer at every virtue, the pleasant companion of every vice, has been the one to record some of the brightest exceptions to the system in which he moved and had his being.

The freedom of the times, the liberty of thought and action in which she had been brought up, the independence of all conventional forms, except those of courtly ceremony, which prevailed during the whole time of her youth—the very dangers, difficulties, intrigues, cabals, slaughter, agitation, and extraordinary circumstances, which marked the latter years of Charles the Second—had rendered Hortensia independent, from a very early period, of the world's opinion ; and, in the case of Ralph Woodhall, she had already paid it more deference than she was ever inclined to pay.

True, had she asked her own heart why she yielded thus far to a power she contemned and despised, she might have found a weakness in her own bosom which counselled caution. But she would ask her own heart nothing, as I have before said. Like an unskilful general, in the certainty of some strong points—honor, uprightness, purity, and truth—she thought her position impregnable, and made no allowance for the easy slope of passion, or the covert ways of love.

Thus onward she walked with him, repelling, with utter scorn, the very thought of his quitting her house, on account of what the world might say. I know not whether the thought presented itself to her mind, that there was an easy way of silencing the tongue of scandal, by uniting their fate for ever. I rather think not; but I am quite sure that such a thought never crossed the mind of Ralph. However, if she was satisfied, he had no cause to be otherwise; for he was not such a

Quixote in delicacy as to fear that which, with her better knowledge, *she* did not fear.

He laughed gaily, then—more gaily than he had done for many a day—and said, “Well, dear Lady Danvers, I only sought to show my devotion to your will, by my readiness to go, rather than put you in unpleasant circumstances ; but, at the same time, I must tell you that no such dangers exist in my case as you have been led to suppose. My poor cousin Henry—by whose hand soever he fell—owes not his death to me. I would have sacrificed any thing, but honor, rather than have crossed swords with him. Every moment of my long absence from the inn, which perhaps you may have heard of, and which might have given time, though barely, for me to return to Norwich, can be accounted for.”

“Ay, that is what has puzzled me,” observed Hortensia, before he had quite concluded what he had to say. “Two different accusations have been brought

against you, which are, at first sight, incompatible with each other. The one is, that you went back to Norwich ; fought ; and slew your cousin Henry : the other, that you passed several hours in comforting and consoling the unhappy family of the poor non-conformist minister. But I made anxious enquiry of the people of the inn, and none could tell at what hour you returned. They said you must have stabled and groomed your horse yourself ; and I concluded that some mistake must have been made about the hour of the duel ; for everything I had heard before we set out, and everything contained in the Duke of Norfolk's private letter to myself, seemed to prove that such a duel had taken place."

"I never quitted the town," said Ralph. "I never took my horse from the stable ; and, in regard to the duel, I had not the most remote idea that such a lamentable event had taken place, till I arrived in these domains."

"Nay, I doubt you not in the least,"

rejoined Hortensia ; “but, though guiltless of your cousin’s death—and even if you could prove your innocence completely, which might be more difficult than you imagine—your situation would still be one of imminent peril ; and you must not think of stirring from this house so long as you can be here in safety. How long that may be, in these distracted times, who can say ?”

“But what is the peril, dear lady ?” enquired Ralph. “My innocence of my cousin’s death can surely be easily proved, I can account for every moment of my time.”

“Did any one see you return to the inn ?” asked Lady Danvers “I made enquiries, and all the servants of the house assured me that such was not the case.”

Ralph mused for a moment or two, and then replied,

“It is very strange. I do not recollect having seen any one. I entered by the door from the stable-yard, saw a light

burning in the entrance, took it up, and went straight to my own room."

"At what hour was this?" asked Hortensia.

"I cannot well say," replied Ralph. "It must have been after ten, but I think before eleven."

"The Duke's letter to myself," observed Lady Danvers, "said the hour of the duel was some time between ten and twelve. Now, Ralph, consider upon how nice calculations your fate might depend. Those who know you well, will have no doubt; but those who do not know you—a prejudiced judge—perhaps, a packed jury—will, at all events, suspect, and, if they *do* suspect, your death would be the consequence."

"Nay, I cannot think it," answered Ralph Woodhall. "Duels occur every day; and, where no dishonorable act accompanies them, we never hear of any such severity."

"But you deny the duel," said Lady



Danvers ; “you cannot admit that it occurred. Yet certain is it, that your cousin sent you a challenge for that very hour—that he met some one—that the meeting took place at night—that there were no witnesses —and that he was killed. Your very denial of the meeting would be construed into a consciousness of guilt in the transaction.”

The colour had been mounting higher and higher in Ralph’s cheek every moment, as he saw the extraordinary complication of circumstances which rendered it most difficult for him to prove his innocence ; and he was almost led to fancy that Hortensia believed him guilty still.

“Upon my honour as a man, and my faith as a Christian, dear Lady Danvers,” he affirmed, “I had no share in this transaction whatever.”

Hortensia laid her hand gently on his arm, and said, looking full in his face, “And, upon *my* honour and faith, Ralph Woodhall, I believe you. But I

mentioned other perils besides these. The magistrates, it is true, dismissed the charge against you of attempting to rescue old Mr. Callaway, the non conformist preacher ; but hardly had you left the town, when it was discovered that you had passed a considerable portion of the night with the family of that poor, persecuted man. You know how severe the laws are upon that subject, and how tyrannically they are exercised. It was proved that several other persons had visited the house that night as well as yourself. They were all arrested and committed to prison. A new charge of attending a night-conventicle, contrary to law, was preferred against you ; and a warrant was immediately issued for your apprehension. The case would be a perilous one at any time ; but since this rash insurrection by the Duke of Monmouth, who is the great leader of the Calvinistic party, the dangers would be incalculable, even were not the matter complicated by other serious accusations. Nay, nay, you

must stay here, Ralph, till we may find means of getting you out of the country. Monmouth must be mad, I think, or fearfully misinformed."

We often perceive that when the mind is bewildered by considerations too intricately tangled and commixed to be easily separated and reduced to order, it receives the first pretext that presents itself to fly to some other theme, however irrelevant or unimportant, as if to refresh itself before it returns to its more laborious task. Such was probably the case with Ralph Woodhall; for, without pursuing the subject of his own fate farther, he said, "I forgot to mention that the Duke of Monmouth was here this morning, and staid for more than an hour."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Lady Danvers, in a tone of no great satisfaction. "I wish he had stayed away. I can never forgive him."

"He left a packet for you," added Ralph; "committing it to my charge, and

saying that it contained a letter for you from an old and dear friend who still loved you well."

"Alas, alas!" ejaculated Lady Danvers. "Poor Henrietta! Where once she loves, she loves for ever. Love has been her ruin and her blight; for she was never taught that there are higher and holier things than even love.—Let us go in, Ralph. I must read her letter, for she is still very dear to me."

## CHAPTER XI.

“At the house of Lady Danvers, say you? On the far edge of Dorsetshire?” ejaculated the voice of an old man, tremulous and eager with strong passion.

“Yes, my dear Lord,” replied Robert Woodhall; “at Danvers Newchurch—a place where a strong-armed man could pitch a crown-piece into three counties. He has doubtless chosen that retreat, partly because he fancies a warrant may be easily evaded; partly—”

“But are you sure, Robert—quite sure?” asked Lord Woodhall. “Do not let us make another mistake.”

"I am quite sure," answered his young cousin. "I have the news from three of our own people who have seen him there. You know my mother's place lies at no great distance ; and the whole country round rings with the rumour that he is to be married to lady Danvers—the causer probably, of his taking the life of a better man than himself."

"Married to the gallows first!" cried Lord Woodhall, vehemently. "Call a servant, boy ; bid him bring my hat and cloak. I will away to the King. Monmouth lies about there, they say. He was last heard of, marching towards Exeter. Fever-sham and Churchill are after him ; and the troops may serve *our* purpose as well as the King's."

"Shall I attend you, sir?" asked Robert.

"No, no," answered the old lord. "Stay here till I come back. Go and comfort poor Margaret. She bears up a little now, but still weeps often. It will glad her

heart to hear there is a chance of catching her brother's murderer at last."

A slight, hardly perceptible, smile curled Robert Woodhall's lip ; but, turning away, to conceal the emotions of which he was conscious, he called Lord Woodhall's servants to their master, and then saw him deferentially to the door.

There are as great varieties in love as in any other passion. Seldom found altogether pure, it is often mixed with a thousand various alloys, some more, some less, congenial to itself. Now, it must not be supposed that Robert Woodhall was altogether without love, of a certain kind, for his fair cousin Margaret. True, it was of a coarse nature, even in its very origin. Her beauty—her fresh, warm, healthful loveliness—had attractions for a man who, even before he could count manhood, had sated himself with licentious pleasures. But even this baser sort of love was mingled with many other feelings. Ambition had its share, and avarice ; and, strange to say, spite and

revenge too. He saw that Margaret did not love him : he felt intuitively that she would never love him ; but that conviction diminished not in the least the ardour of his pursuit. It prompted a desire to grieve her, whenever he could do so without appearing as the active agent ; but took not the least from the desire to possess her as his wife, nor shook his resolution to attain that object by any means, however base.

Quietly walking up the stairs, he entered the room where she usually sat during the morning, but found it vacant. He remained a few minutes, gazing from the window into the street, till the door opened, and Margaret herself appeared.

With a cold inclination of the head, she was about to withdraw immediately. But her cousin called to her, saying, "Margaret, Margaret! I have something to tell you from your father. He wishes you to stay with me till his return, when he will give you further tidings."

Margaret obeyed at once, entered, sat



down, and drew an embroidery frame towards her.

“Very satisfactory intelligence has been received this morning,” said Robert Woodhall. “My Lord, your father, has gone to make the most of it. We have discovered the place where poor Henry’s murder lies concealed.”

Though tears for her brother rose in Margaret’s eyes, she would not hear Ralph called by such a name. “You have no right, sir,” she said, “so boldly to announce my cousin Ralph a murderer till he has been proved so.”

Robert Woodhall saw her emotion with infinite pleasure ; and he answered in a quiet tone, though with a slightly curled lip, “I did not know that there was any doubt of it.”

“Great doubt,” replied Margaret. “I, for one, do not believe that Ralph would ever have drawn his sword against poor Henry ; and there are others, wiser and better able

to judge than myself, who do not believe it either.

“Indeed!” exclaimed Robert Woodhall, with unfeigned surprise. “Pray who?”

“For one, the Duke of Norfolk,” answered Margaret.

“You astonish me,” said Robert, musing. “Then pray whom do you and the good Duke suspect?”

Something contemptuous and bitter was in his tone, which kindled a corresponding answer in Margaret’s breast; and she said, “No one in particular, Robert Woodhall; but we should suspect *you*, just as soon as poor Ralph. Pray where is he, if you have discovered?”

One of his slight, shrewd, sarcastic smiles came upon Robert Woodhall’s face, as he answered, “He is at Danvers Newchurch, the seat of the fair Hortensia, to whom he is about to be married, if the hangman does not previously perform for him a ceremony of a different kind.”

“Unfeeling, heartless man !” exclaimed Margaret, rising, with her face flushed, to quit the room ; but Robert placed himself in her way, saying, “Your father wishes you to stay here till he returns. Why do you call me unfeeling, Margaret ? I did not intend either to offend or grieve you.”

Margaret returned, and seated herself ; but when he again asked the question, she said, without giving a direct reply,

“If my father wishes me to remain, I will remain ; but I remain not to converse with you, Robert Woodhall. I tell you, I doubt you—nay more, I do not believe you. More than once I have detected you in saying things that were untrue ; and I will now know, as soon as my father returns, whether it was his wish or will that I should remain with one whose society is unpleasant to me.”

The pale, somewhat yellowish, tinge of Robert Woodhall's face, gave way to burning red. He felt that he was understood and unmasked by a woman—by a mere girl ;

and there is no offence so bitter to a villain as to have his character unveiled.

“I will repay you,” he thought, “I will repay you.” But, at the same time, he would have given a good deal to escape from the room, in order to meet Lord Woodhall before he should see his daughter, and guard against the questions she might ask. He suffered some minutes to pass, however, for the purpose of covering his manœuvre ; then, rising, he said, “Your father is longer than I expected. I fear I must go ; I have an engagement.”

Grief is a great teacher of the human heart ; and Margaret had learned much since first she was presented to the reader.

“Your pardon, Robert Woodhall,” she rejoined. “You stay here till my father returns. What you have told me is either true or false. If it be true, you are bound to remain with *me*, as I was commanded to remain with *you*.—Nay, not a word ! Sit down, or I will call those who will make you.”

She was nearer to the door than himself, and she moved towards it, and laid her hand upon the latch.

Before Robert Woodhall could recover from his surprise, the voice of the old lord sounded below, and the next instant his step was heard upon the stairs. Margaret stood quietly by the door. Her cousin did not venture to move ; but few human hearts have felt the rage and hatred which filled his at that moment.

A minute after, Lord Woodhall entered the room ; and, before he could speak of anything else, Margaret exclaimed, with a boldness unusual with her, especially in speaking to her parent, "My dear lord and father, this gentleman informs me it was your command that I should remain here with him till you returned. I beseech you, tell me whether this is true or false ; *I* do not believe it."

"False!" cried the old lord, sharply. "I never said such a thing. What is the meaning of this, sir ?"

“Only a lover’s trifling artifice, my dear lord,” replied Robert Woodhall, with a pleasant smile. “I did but stretch your words a little. You said I was to go and stay with her till you came back; and I chose to read your meaning that she was to stay with me.”

“Lover!” echoed Margaret, in a bitter emphasis, as she turned to quit the room.

The old lord, however, detained her by the hand, saying, “Oh, is that all? Stay, stay, Margaret; this is no very unforgiveable offence. Stay, I have news for you.”

“I hope good news, my Lord,” said Robert Woodhall. “The King, I trust, has entered into your views?”

“As warmly as heart could wish,” replied the old nobleman. “Feversham has received His Majesty’s commands to order Colonel Kirke to occupy Danvers Newchurch with his regiment, and to arrest the fugitive. The object is to be concealed, and the occupation of the house and village to pass for

a mere military operation, till they have got the murderer in their hands. Otherwise he might escape us again, boy, in the troubled state of the country."

"Your lordship calls him 'murderer,'" said Robert Woodhall quietly, eager but to make mischief between the parent and the child; "Mistress Margaret, however, objects to my use of that term, and says she does not believe Ralph Woodhall committed the act."

"How is that, how is that? Not believe?" cried Lord Woodhall, turning towards his daughter, and dropping her hand.

"The Duke of Norfolk does not believe it, my lord," replied Margaret. "I received a letter from him this morning, with the trinkets I left behind me in my room at Norwich. He says that he has reason to think some great mistake has been committed, and that my cousin Ralph is quite free from all participation in the deed."

“ Who does he suspect then ?” demanded Lord Woodhall.

“ I will bring you his letter, my father,” replied Margaret, fixing her eyes firmly upon the face of Robert Woodhall. “ You will there see that he suspects a very different person, and will comprehend why to remain in that gentleman’s society was most unpleasant to your daughter.”

“ What does he say, what does he say? No need of the letter just now,” ejaculated the impetuous old lord. “ I can read that afterwards. Tell me the substance of what he says.”

“ I have told you part, my father,” replied Margaret ; “ but he adds that it is clearly proved there was no quarrel between Ralph and poor Henry, though there was between Ralph and Master Robert Woodhall. He says that they parted perfect friends at supper ; that they never met afterwards during the whole night ; that no challenge was delivered



to Ralph ; and that he has good reason to believe, from circumstances which have lately come to his knowledge, that my cousin never returned to Norwich after he himself had sent him away to escort Lady Danvers on her journey. He says, indeed, that to have done so, in the circumstances of which he is personally cognizant, implies almost an impossibility. The Duke adds," continued Margaret, with a voice which trembled a little at the gravity of the words she was about to utter, " that, undoubtedly, Robert Woodhall attempted to produce a quarrel between Ralph and my poor brother ; and he remarks, that Henry's death could be of no possible advantage to Ralph, but that it might be so to other persons."

Lord Woodhall glared round with a look of bewildered rage ; but Robert caught the ball at the rebound with great skill.

"His Grace of Norfolk must think that you take great interest, Mistress Margaret, in your *poor* cousin Ralph," he said ; " but that

is no matter. Strange as it may seem, my dear Lord, I am very glad that this foolish suspicion has been so plainly stated. An innocent man laughs at such things. He does not run away from investigation. Indeed, did not the Duke's dislike of myself blind him, he could not fail to see how ridiculous all this is. Henry's own letter to the Duke himself, which you have seen, shows that the challenge was given and accepted; and I can prove easily, not only that I never quitted my room that night, but that I did all in my power to dissuade Henry from the course he was following. He was headstrong, and would have his own way. My servant can prove many of these facts. He is in the house; call him up, and examine him. I wish no previous interview with him. I have no lesson to teach him."

The man was called; but he had already taught himself his own lesson, and he mentioned those facts only, of all that had occurred at Norwich, which could

show his master's character in the fairest light.

Lord Woodhall was quite satisfied, but Margaret was not so. She had a sort of instinct in this case, and it led her right.

## CHAPTER XII.

SOME days had passed at Danvers Newchurch ; and I must not dwell upon their passing. "Time warns me to be brief," as worthy clergymen say in long-composed sermons, where, in the act of composition, no reference to time existed. But time, and the end of the volume apparent to the view, (which are, to an author, what time and the end of life ought to be to every man), warn me that I *must* be brief.

Several days had passed at Danvers Newchurch since Hortensia Danvers and Ralph Woodhall had entered that house

arm-in-arm. Fill up the time as you will, reader. I cannot dwell upon it. Very little passed of any consequence. We all know how trifles will become bulky when we are trying to pack closely the portmantau of the present. A child's toy will take up more room than a volume of philosophy, and a blown India-rubber ball occupy ten times more space than all the essays of John Locke.

The days at Danvers Newchurch, of which I speak, had been filled with trifles. They formed a period of little or no progress. Country gentlemen—Esquires, and Justices, and Barons, and Lords of high degree—had come to offer their services and compliments to the young, graceful, and beautiful Lady Danvers, on her return to her ancestral home. Country gossips had flocked thither to see, and hear, and know, all that was going on ; for certain reports had been carried about by the tongue of rumour, as to the sojourn of a

young and handsome cavalier within the walls of Danvers Newchurch.

At first, Hortensia was somewhat puzzled what to do ; for with all her readiness—which proceeded more from simple purity and rectitude of purpose, enlightened by a bright, clear mind, than any worldly wisdom—she could not help feeling that she was commencing a struggle against a very muddy but turbulent torrent, called “the World,” which only a stout heart could stem.

If she refused to receive such visitors, she was certain to subject herself to misconstruction. If she appeared with Ralph, there was still a danger of misconstruction, and peril to him likewise. She resolved to receive them all ; and she did so with quiet ease, and calm, though rather cold, demeanour, which rebuked curiosity and put calumny at fault. She would not suffer Ralph, however, to appear ; impressing upon him strongly the necessity of con-

cealment, for his own safety, and taking such means as her knowledge of the country, and her more general experience of the world and the world's ways, enabled her to adopt, of finding some means of conveying him secretly to the coast of Holland. Every morning, servants on horseback went out to different ports on the western shores of England. Every evening, servants returned, bringing no satisfactory tidings. Nearly one half of life is consumed in emptiness, and three quarters, at least, in emptiness and disappointment taken together. So it was at Danvers New-church.

It may be asked, if Hortensia, when the consciousness came upon her that she had to strive, as it were, against the stream of the world's opinion, did not sometimes say to herself—

“Ralph's arm may, at any time, save me, and bear me safe to shore.”

I do not think she did so ; for it was a

subject on which she did not like her thoughts to rest. She was fain to believe, and did believe, that she was actuated by no feeling but one—a sincere, unmingled desire of freeing a man whom she esteemed, the son of her mother's best friend, from perils and difficulties undeserved. Yet there were various little incidents—very indefinite — very intangible — a word dropped now and then—a deep fit of thought, after the name of Margaret Woodhall had been mentioned—a grave and solemn earnestness of manner in protesting that nothing on earth could have induced him to draw his sword against Henry Woodhall—which, like the light gusts of the evening wind, bringing misty clouds upon the western sky, cast, over Hortensia's contemplated future, a vague, uncertain gloom, from which she was fain to turn her eyes, and rejoice in the sunshine of the present, when she and Ralph spent the evenings alone together in her



wide, richly-furnished withdrawing-room, sometimes reading authors whom we venerate as fathers of the poetry and prose of England, but who were then hardly consecrated by the hand of Time ; sometimes playing, upon instruments then in vogue, music which might strike us, perhaps, in the present day, as poor in the harmony, but which had a freshness, and vigour in the melody, rarely to be found in this all steaming age.

In the darkness of the night, Hortensia would often lie awake for hours, not indulging in apprehension or regretful thoughts—not even, like the patriarch, struggling with the Angel of Hope, to win a boon at last from the Giver of all happiness ; but watching like a warder upon a tower, to prevent the entrance of any of the enemies that flocked continually forward to obtain admittance into the fortress of the mind.

Sometimes, wearied with this dark, silent

strife, she would wake her maid, who now slept in the same room, and bid her strike a light, and give her a book to while away the tedious hours till daylight came. This being done, the maid would creep again to bed, and fall, in a moment, into dreamless, heavy slumber, the envy of the high-born lady lying near.

One night—I call the period of darkness, night—Hortensia, after reading for sometime, placed the book beneath her pillow, raised her fair arm, as children do, under her head, and, with the rich curls of her unfilleted hair falling over it and partly shrouding her face, tried to obtain a brief, refreshing draught of that sweet, calm, morning sleep which often visits us just in the sober-coloured dawn of day. At that moment, she heard the trotting of a horse ; and, a minute after, the great bell rang sharply.

No one answered, and several seconds passed, when the bell rang again ; and,

shortly after, slow and tardy steps paced the marble hall towards the great door.

A gray light was, by this time, stealing into the room; and Hortensia, partly roused again, exclaimed, between sleep and waking, "Alice, Alice, some one is ringing the great bell. Throw on some clothes, and go and ask what is the matter."

The girl was already awake; for she had slept long and deeply, and the ringing of the bell had roused her. She was soon partly dressed, and gone; and Hortensia heard her talking with the old porter over the balustrade of the stair-case. The interrogatory seemed to deviate into a gossip; and when the maid came back, saying, "Nothing but some letters, my lady, brought by a messenger for Mr. Ralph Woodhall," Hortensia was fast asleep, and unconscious of the words spoken.

When she again awoke, some two hours afterwards, she made further enquiries; and, on being informed of what had occur-

red, hastened to dress herself as rapidly as possible.

On descending to the breakfast-room, or little hall, as it was called at that time in her dwelling, she found three letters addressed to Ralph Woodhall, lying undelivered on the table. The porter had not thought it worth while to wake the young gentleman, he said ; and Hortensia at once despatched a messenger to her guest, who appeared soon after with the letters open in his hand.

“ Any news ? any tidings ? ” asked Hortensia, eagerly. “ The sight of those letters frightens me ; for it is clear some one has discovered the place of your retreat ; and our secret is no longer safe.”

“ It has been discovered indeed,” replied Ralph ; “ but how, I know not. However, two or three letters are to warn me that this place is no longer safe for me. There is one of them.”

As he spoke, he gave into the hands of Lady Danvers a sheet of coarse paper,

on which were written a few lines in a bold hand. She read them attentively, and then, raising her eyes to his face, enquired, "Who is this person who signs himself Moraber?"

"I can hardly tell you," replied Ralph. "He is a strange, solitary being of whose history I know nothing, except that he was a college companion of the Duke of Norfolk; that he gave himself up from a very early period to the study of judicial astrology, and seems, by that or some other means, to have obtained a very strange degree of knowledge regarding the fortunes and feelings of a great multitude of persons. You will see in another letter, which I will shew you in a moment, that he takes no slight interest in my own affairs, and has done me justice in matters where even those who loved me well were inclined to doubt me."

"But from whom is that very long letter? if my curiosity be pardonable."

asked Hortensia, pointing to a piece of foolscap closely covered.

“This is from my good father,” replied Ralph, with a smile; “and if you will take the trouble of perusing the first few sentences, you will see, dear lady, that one brought up in such principles, was not likely to take his cousin’s life in a duel.”

Lady Danvers took the letter, and read what follows :—

“DEAR SON,

“I have been in a state of anguish of mind not to be described, from Wednesday last, the twenty-second of the month, till this present Tuesday, the twenty-eighth. I have heard, and that from authority which appeared not capable of being doubted, that you had been mad enough to engage in a duel, notwithstanding all the principles I have endeavoured to instil into your mind ; that you had killed your adversary ; and

that the slain man was your cousin Henry. Now I have ever held, and have endeavoured to teach you to hold, that duelling is not only murder, but murder of the most aggravated kind. The slaughter of a man may take place by accident—by a hasty blow in a moment of passion—in self defence when suddenly assailed—or in a great tumult or commotion ; and in these cases the law of man—and, let us not doubt, the law of God also—deals leniently. But in the case of a duel there is no sound and legitimate excuse whatsoever for the man who slays another. He has time for reflection ; therefore the act is deliberate and premeditated. He goes out to kill, and he kills. Nor is it any mitigation of his offence that his adversary came there with the same purpose towards himself ; for the crime of the one can never excuse the crime of the other. Still less is it an excuse that duelling is a custom of society ; for every Christian and every philosopher

must perceive that this custom of society is in itself a criminal one, a proof of its barbarism, rather than of its civilization ; and he who sanctions it by his example, commits, in addition to the particular crime of murder, a general offence against society and mankind, by encouraging and perpetuating a criminal habit which all good men should unite to put down. Thus, to the eyes of God, and to the eyes of all reasoning men likewise, the act of killing another in a duel, is the most aggravated kind of murder ; for the evil is not confined to the offence, but spreads round as a diffusive poison, affecting detrimentally the whole mass of society. There are but three occasions in which any man is justified in taking the life of another : in actual defence of his own life ; in defence of his country ; and in obedience to the laws of his country. All other cases are murder. Now, you may easily conceive, my dear son, how much pain it gave me to think for one whole week that my son was



a murderer. I have this day, however, received from a person calling himself Moraber, whom you must have heard of in our neighbourhood, the most strong and solemn assurance that you are innocent of this terrible offence ; that you did not fight your cousin ; and that he was slain by some other hand. I believe the information to be correct, for my informant is above suspicion ; yet I beseech you, if it be possible, write me the same assurance, that my mind may be freed completely from anguish such as I have never known,—nay, not even when it pleased Heaven to take from me your beloved mother.”

The writing went on several pages farther ; but Lady Danvers stopped there, and returned the letter to Ralph, saying, “I agree with him entirely, Ralph. But to return to this Moraber. What can he know of anything that is taking place here ? He tells you that immediate flight

is necessary to your safety ; and that you have but two days to execute it after the receipt of his letter ; yet the letter itself is nearly a fortnight old."

"I have still surer information than that," replied Ralph. "Here is another letter which I will show to no eyes but your own, dear Lady Danvers. After all your kindness and generosity towards me, however, I can keep back no secret of my heart from you."

Again Lady Danvers took the letter he offered, and read. It was brief, hastily written in a woman's hand, and to the following effect :—

"An opportunity has suddenly presented itself, dear Ralph, of sending to you a few lines ; and I seize it, first, to assure you that, notwithstanding all that men accuse you of, I do not believe one word of the tale. Your love for Margaret would never suffer you to slay her brother.

Secondly, I write to tell you that dangers of various kinds menace you where you are. Your place of concealment has been discovered. Orders will be despatched this very night to the troops marching against the Duke of Monmouth, to occupy Danvers Newchurch as a military post, and apprehend you if you are found there. Fly immediately ; and, if possible, till the storm is passed, take refuge across the sea. The dear lady with whom you are, will doubtless be able to find you the means of escape and, if so, will merit more even than at present, the eternal gratitude of

“ Your own

“ MARGARET.”

Strange and beautiful were the changes of expression which came over the face of Hortensia Danvers as she read those words. The very first sentence called the warm blood rushing into her cheek ; like the light of the morning sun kindling the white

clouds on the horizon. Then the glow faded away; back, back to the heart, every warm, thrilling drop was withdrawn, and her face remained pale as that of a marble statue; while her eyes were fixed upon the lines as if every word had been a fate to her. Even after she had done, she held the letter still in her hand, gazing at it in deep silence.

“I must tell you, dear Lady Danvers,” said Ralph, in his inexperience, not reading her looks aright, “I must tell you that my cousin Margaret and myself have loved each other warmly from childhood; and that it was the hope—a hope almost insane—of winning her father’s consent to our union, that led me forth to seek my fortune in the wide world.”

“Here, take it, take it,” ejaculated Hortensia, putting the letter in his hand. “I will be back directly. All this news confounds me—I must think alone and in

quiet. I will be back soon, and we will decide upon something."

Again the warm blood rushed into her cheek, as if some sudden thought, for which she took shame to herself, crossed her mind secretly ; and she added, in a faltering voice, "To have my house occupied by troops !—I will be back presently."

For nearly half an hour, Ralph walked up and down the hall alone ; but then, with a slow and languid step, Hortensia rejoined him and seated herself near the table. Not a trace of tears was upon her cheek : she had evidently not been weeping : but she was still as pale as alabaster, though her eyes beamed with even more light than usual. Was it that a deadly struggle of passions had been in her heart ?—that she had been the victor ?—that the light of triumph was in her eyes, but that the exhaustion of combat well nigh overpowered even the conqueror ? Perhaps so ; but certainly she betrayed no evidence of the struggle in her manner towards Ralph.

She was as kind, as warm, as eager as ever.

He had still the roll of letters in his hand ; and, pointing to them, she said, with her sweet smile and musical voice, " I must do something, Ralph, to win this dear girl's gratitude, as she trusts to me. Let me see the letter again."

He gave it to her. She read it through ; and then, murmuring " May she be happy !" pressed her lips on Margaret's name. When she gave it back to Ralph, a single tear was upon it ; and that was all she shed.

" Now," said Hortensia, gaily, " we must to council to see if we cannot out-manœuvre our enemies. Farther down the coast is a little port called Seaton, where there used to be large and very safe boats which they call luggers. I was a great favourite there with the good fishermen when I was a child ; and, methinks, if we can reach that port, it would be very easy to hire one of these boats, if not to convey

you to the coast of France or Holland, at least to land you at some other English port where you may find a vessel ready to sail."

"Perhaps I had better set out at once," said Ralph. "My horse is quite fresh now, and, with some one to guide me, I could reach the port rapidly."

"No, no, that will never do," replied Lady Danvers; "the country is all covered with troops, and you will be stopped to a certainty. I will tell you how we must manage. During the day, we will send out people in all directions to ascertain what roads are clear. Then, towards evening, we will set out in my carriage. For an hour's drive round the place, no one dare stop me; and after that we shall have darkness to befriend us. We can take the roads we know to be open; and, as your friend Moraber gives you two whole days, we shall be within the limit."

"Nay, nay," said Ralph, "I will not

have you peril yourself for me. That must not be, dear Lady Danvers."

"Well, I will convoy you part of the way," said Hortensia. "Let your servant ride on to Seaton, obtain information there, and meet us on the road. One of my people can mount your horse; and, when you need the beast, get upon the carriage to return. This will be the surest way; and, if we obtain good intelligence, I shall run no risk—nor you either, I trust, Ralph."

So was it settled; and, the same evening, Ralph and Hortensia began a pilgrimage which will require a chapter to itself.



## CHAPTER XIII.

VERY few visitors had been to Danvers Newchurch during the morning. Something had kept every one away but the parson of the parish, and an old lady of the village who held a sort of middle station between the gentry and the yeomanry of the country, and prided herself upon knowing all the affairs of both. Trustworthy servants, however, had been coming and going all the day, and they brought intelligence which showed that a considerable circuit must be taken round the town of Axminster in order to avoid the two contending parties in the western counties,

then actually coming to hard blows with each other.

About four o'clock, Gaunt Stilling set off on horseback for Seaton, the way to which he knew well, and his business at which place was explained to him easily. He was to meet Lady Danvers and Ralph a little to the eastward of Axminster, and let them know the result of his enquiries at Seaton ; but his instructions were totally independent of the various scouts which had been sent forth ; and the rumours which Hortensia received from the latter, were—especially towards the close of the day—rather contradictory.

Nevertheless, about an hour before sunset, the great, lumbering carriage was brought round to the door ; the lady and Ralph entered it, and, followed by several armed servants on horseback, they took their way towards the upper gates, by a road not quite so much frequented as either the lower road or the foot-path which crossed the park below the house. It was

a soft and not unpleasant evening, such as one often finds in that climate, with a misty, hazy sort of air through which the sun struggled from time to time, shedding a rosy light over the whole scene around.

Hortensia was somewhat silent, and evidently anxious—I do not mean to say frightened, for she was unconscious of any personal danger; but the perils to her companion seemed to weigh upon her, and, when she did converse, her whole conversation consisted of enquiries, consultations, and advice as to the best means of passing undetected till an assured place of safety should be reached. Every consideration seemed merged in that one. There was no longer the airy, lark-like flight of fancy which had often, in the leisure hours preceding, carried away the mind of Ralph Woodhall into far, ethereal fields of space; there was no longer the calm, thoughtful, yet not unimaginative, wandering of the spirit through more familiar scenes, drawing as much essence of dream from a cow-

slip, or a primrose, or a violet, as bolder efforts of the fancy would extract from the high mountain or the floating cloud. It was all now hard, dry matter of necessity and business. That was the sole difference between the communion of the preceding days and the present ; but it was great. The edge of the sky grew rosy ; the sun set ; the night came. The misty clouds from which had occasionally dropped large tears on the earth, passed away like gloomy thoughts from a bright mind ; and star by star came out in the refreshed sky, and looked down upon the earth in melancholy calmness.

Alone, and side by side, Hortensia Danvers and Ralph Woodhall wended slowly on. I must not pretend to look into her bosom—the eye of man never did : some women might have divined what mysterious things were passing therein ; but even of women, not all.

It were vain to say that at that moment—which to him seemed the real parting

moment,—Ralph Woodhall did not feel many deep or strong emotions at the thought of being parted—perhaps for ever—from one so beautiful, so gentle, so generous, so kind. It is too rare to find pure, disinterested friendship on the earth, for one of a high heart to meet with it untouched. Ralph forgot himself—his fate—his peril—the pressing urgency of petty circumstances—the momentary dangers that beset his way—the trifling incidents that, at every step, might change his destiny, for good or ill. He thought only of Hortensia; and yet with such thoughts that Margaret might have seen them all, joined them, and shared them.

There was a deep silence for a considerable length of time. Had any other soul been within the carriage, not sharing in the thoughts of its occupants, to him it would have seemed very long. To them it was all too brief for the crowded feelings they forced into it.

At length, Ralph could refrain no more

He took Hortensia's hand in his, pressed it to his lips, and said, "Oh, dear Lady Danvers, how can I ever thank you sufficiently—how can I ever explain to you all I feel? Your kindness—your many acts of kindness—have come upon me, like a torrent, so rapidly that I have had no time to breathe or think till this moment; and now, when I still feel the full force of all, we are going to part, God knows how long."

"Hush!" ejaculated Hortensia, in a low, agitated voice, "hush!" And for a single instant she leaned her fair brow upon his shoulder. Then, raising it calmly, she added, "Ralph, my dear brother, we must not think of anything which can withdraw our attention from the present perilous hour. If you escape happily and well, as God in his great mercy grant, tell your Margaret, with Hortensia's love, that she did all in her power to save and aid you. Nay, tell her," she added in a more cheerful tone—though there was a touch of

flattering effort about it too—"nay, tell her that, in after years, perhaps, when storms have vanished and the skies are clear, Hortensia will come to visit you both in your happiness, and claim the gratitude Margaret promised, and rejoicingly talk of days of sorrow and of peril passed away."

Silence fell upon them again.—Was that a sob?—It was very like one.

Whatever it might have been, it was drowned, the moment after, in the rattle of musketry: there was a flash too—distant, but near enough to show suddenly the tower of a large cathedral-looking church, long lines of houses, and stacks of chimneys, and undulating hedgerows, and wavy-outlined trees. The next moment—not in one volley, but in an irregular, running fire—shot after shot was heard, sometimes single, sometimes two or three together, sometimes as if from whole platoons; while quickly reiterated flashes ran along all the hedgerows within sight; and then the roar of

a cannon or two was heard, with a shrill sound of fifes and drums.

In an instant, Ralph's hand was upon the door of the carriage, and, before Hortensia could beseech him to forbear, he had sprung out.

"Here, Jones, give me my horse," he cried. "Turn round the carriage, and away back with all speed. What! is the lane too narrow? Onwards there seems a wider space. Stay! I will ride on and see. Coachman, you must get your mistress out of this peril as speedily as possible. Come after me slowly. Some one put the cushions against the front windows.—You, men on horseback, gather round the carriage; take no part with any one, but defend your lady."

Then dashing forward, he was for a moment lost in the darkness, till his voice was heard shouting, "Here! here is room to turn;" and the coachman hurried on his horses at the utmost speed to a spot where a wide open space, with a gate leading



into a field, seemed to give a chance of wheeling round the lumbering vehicle.

At that moment, however, just as the four horses, somewhat restive with the noise and confusion, were plunging and rearing, and a man on foot was striving to turn the heads of the leaders round, the whole evolution was interrupted by a number of men in military garb, but not array, running as if for life up the lane, and dashing against the horses and carriage.

One of the fugitives exclaimed, evidently mistaking Ralph, who had his sword drawn, for some one else, "All's lost, my Lord, all's lost! Monmouth has won the day, and the men are running like devils."

Thus saying, he flung his musket into a ditch, and ran on, only to be succeeded by another still more terrified, who had already denuded himself of cap and weapons, and was struggling to get out of a military jacket which seemed to cling to him like the coat of Nessus. He cried, "Monmouth! Monmouth! The Protestant religion for

ever, and damn Papacy, and prelacy, and the Pope of Rome !”

“ Here, draw up across the lane,” shouted Ralph, addressing the horsemen who accompanied the carriage. “ Keep a sufficient space clear for the coach to turn ; let another footman go to the head of the horses.—Get them quickly round. Soothe them, soothe them !”

At that moment, a sharp volley came up the lane, and one of the balls rattled against the carriage. Ralph spurred instantly towards the side ; but, ere he reached it, his horse staggered, and sank upon its haunches.

“ You are not hurt, Hortensia ?” he said, springing from the saddle. “ Oh God ! you are not hurt ?”

“ No, no,” she cried ; “ but you’re wounded, Ralph.”

“ Not in the least,” he answered ; “ it is but the horse.” And, running forward, he aided with better skill in turning the carriage round.

While thus employed, a party of horsemen, of distinguished mien gallopped up the lane, and one of them, with a hat loaded with plumes, paused for an instant to ask, "Whose carriage is this? In Heaven's name, how came you here?"

"We were going to Axminster," replied Ralph; "but now I suppose it is in the hands of the Duke of Monmouth. We can hardly get the carriage round."

"As difficult as I have found to take Axminster, with two regiments of boobies and a handful of ploughmen," observed the other. "I fear we cannot stay to help you. If you fall into the hands of Monmouth, give him the Duke of Albemarle's compliments, and say I hope we shall meet again some day soon."

"Come, come, my Lord, this is no time for jesting," said another of the horsemen; and the party rode on, leaving the ground clearer than it had been before.

A few moments only were now required to turn the carriage completely; but the

lane was deep and muddy, and little progress was likely to be made, while it seemed certain that pursued and pursuers would still be urging their course along the very path which it was necessary to follow in order to reach Danvers Newchurch.

Ralph gave a look at his horse ; but the poor beast was now stretched with his head flat in the clay, and it was necessary to drag him out of the road before the carriage could pass. This consumed some time, and several fugitives hurried by, exclaiming as they went, "They are coming, they are coming! You had better make haste!"

At length the carcass of the horse was removed ; and, taking the pistols from the holsters, Ralph approached the side of the carriage, saying, "I know not whether I can best give you protection by mounting another horse, and riding by your side, or——"

"No, no ; come in, come in," said Hor-

tensia. "I need some one with me—I am foolishly frightened."

Ralph instantly opened the door ; but, turning to the men ere he entered, he said —

"Draw round as close as possible ; each keep a cocked pistol in his hand. Bid every one stand off, for that we are peaceful travellers avoiding the affray. Be firm, but forbear any violence. Now, coachman, drive on as fast as you can go."

Thus saying, he entered the carriage, and seated himself by Hortensia's side, while the coachman plied his whip with terrified vehemence, and the horses dashed on quicker than, probably, they had ever been known to go before. In the rumbling and rattling of the wheels, and their grating through the stones and mud, the sounds from without were not very distinctly heard, although firing, and shouting, and running, were still going on all around. But some clear, sweet, musical tones fell distinctly enough upon Ralph's ear.

"Oh, Ralph, tell me—assure me—that you are not hurt," exclaimed Hortensia. "I am sure I saw you reel upon the horse as if a ball had struck you."

"It was the horse who staggered and fell," replied Ralph. "I can assure you I am not hurt at all."

"Thank God!" ejaculated Hortensia, with a deep sigh; and Ralph went on to add—

"I feared *you* might be hurt; for I heard a bullet strike the carriage."

"Did it?" said Hortensia. "I was not aware of it. It did not come near me. I was looking out, and thinking how you men expose yourselves unnecessarily, more than of anything else."

"Not unnecessarily," returned Ralph; "depend upon it, it needs some one to command under such circumstances."

"And that you did right well, most certainly," rejoined Lady Danvers, assuming a tone of gaiety not very congenial to her feelings. "I could have fancied you a general, and think, indeed, you should have

been a soldier. But what are we to do now ? What is to become of us ?”

“ We must go back to Danvers New-church at once,” answered Ralph. “ We have no other choice, and I must try my fortunes alone early to-morrow morning. It is strange we have heard nothing of Gaunt Stilling.”

Hortensia did not reply ; and, after a moment, Ralph added—

“ The firing seems farther off now, to the east of the town. I strongly suspect Monmouth will not pursue his advantage—his troops are too raw.—Is anything the matter ? You do not speak.”

“ No, Ralph, no,” she answered. “ My heart is very full with many mingled feelings ; some joy—as, for instance, at our escape from danger ; some apprehension ; some grief ; but I trust that to-morrow will bring better fortune, and that, ere night, I shall hear that you are safe, Ralph.”

She called him Ralph twice in the same

short answer ; and it was pleasant to his ear ; but she had remarked that, from the moment when he sprang from the carriage, he had given her no name whatever, except, once, that of Hortensia. He would not—he dared not—call her so again, after the first excitement was over ; and yet, with the warm sound upon his lips, he could not bring them to utter a colder name. Their thoughts were both upon the same subject at the same moment.

The noise of the firing had now nearly ceased. The fugitives, who were still passing, were few and scattered ; the moon was rising slowly in the east, and silvering the heavens behind a wooded hill and a tall, ancient-looking farm-house, upon a high stony bank ; when suddenly a loud voice cried—

“ Halt ! Who goes there ? ”

The coachman instantly pulled in his reins ; and Ralph, putting his head out of the carriage, replied—

“ Friends. Whose post is this ? Stand



off, for the men are armed, and we want no more confusion."

"What friends?" demanded the sentry.

"Lady Danvers and her servants," answered Ralph, knowing that the announcement could do no one but himself any harm. "She is seeking to return to her own house, as she finds she cannot get to Axminster. Who commands at this post, fellow, I ask again?"

"George Monk, Duke of Albemarle," replied the militia-man, stoutly; "and I can tell you, you must stop till he says that you can go on; for if you come a step further, I will shoot one of your great coach-horses."

## CHAPTER XIV

THE sentinel who spoke the words with which the last chapter concluded, was placed in a little hollow way, or cut in the steep bank through which the lane had to wind on in order to pass over the hill. He was evidently a country boor of the Duke of Albemarle's militia, unacquainted with military service, and as likely as not to put his threat of shooting one of the coach-horses into execution.

But before Ralph could think of what was next to be done, or Lady Danvers could say a word, a figure was seen to drop down from the bank behind the soldier,

seize him by the throat, and, with very little ceremony, wrench his musket out of his hands, taking special care to allow him no opportunity of discharging it in the struggle.

“A pretty fellow you are, to stop a lady’s carriage on the King’s highway,” cried a voice, which Ralph recognized right well. “There, go and tell the Duke what you have been doing, and get well punished for your pains. He never told you to stop Lady Danvers’s carriage, I’m sure.”

Thus saying, Gaunt Stilling (for it was he) shook the powder out of the pan of the man’s musket, and, giving him a kick behind, sent him running up towards the farm-house I have mentioned.

“Quick, my lady !” exclaimed Stilling. “You had better drive back to Danvers Newchurch as fast as possible. You cannot pass any other way. I will overtake you soon.—Jog along, Master Coachman.”

He sprang up the bank again as he spoke, and the carriage moved forward.

It is probable that the Duke of Albe-marle, who was of a more jovial temper than his renowned father, only laughed at the sentry's mishap. Certain it is, he gave no orders for pursuing the carriage of Lady Danvers ; and Ralph and his fair companion continued their journey uninterrupted.

That journey, however, was slow in its progress ; and it was nearly two o'clock in the morning before the carriage entered the park. The moon, which had risen clear, had become dim and cloudy ; not altogether obscured, indeed, but partially veiled in thin clouds, amidst which her rays formed a broad yellow halo, auguring ill of the coming weather. The beautiful park itself, the dark trees, the solemn old house standing on its eminence,—all had a sad and gloomy aspect in that sort of dreamy twilight ; and, with a wearied frame and a heart not happy, the buoyant spirit of Hortensia fell. She sat, silent and

thoughtful, by Ralph's side, and more than once felt that she could weep, and find relief in tears, if she were alone.

She restrained them, however, and strove to look cheerful, when Ralph, at length, aided her to alight at her own door.

"Ah, my lady," said Mr. Drayton, "I'm glad to see you back, for rumours have come in of a battle near Axminster."

"In the midst of which we have been, Drayton," added his lady.

"Oh, a mere skirmish, madam," said Gaunt Stilling, advancing from the hall-door. "But I have some news to give you and my master, for which I will crave your attention as soon as may be."

"Come in here—come in here," said Hortensia, turning towards the little room in which Ralph had made his principal abode during her absence.

"If you are going to use the coach to-morrow, my lady," interposed the coachman, coming up the steps, "I had better get the

carpenter and the blacksmith up at once; for two bullets have gone right into the hind axle-tree."

"We can use some other lighter carriage," said Lady Danvers, thoughtfully—"the *Vis-à-vis*—"

"Lord bless you, my lady! it would be knocked all to pieces," interrupted the coachman; "and besides, that can't be, for it is in Lunnun—and all the other carriages, for that matter."

"Well then, Harrison," returned Lady Danvers, "get this mended as well as you can, without sending up to the village.—Now, Master Stilling," added she.

And, accompanied by Ralph, she bade Stilling, who followed, shut the door.

"I'm very sorry, sir," said Gaunt Stilling, addressing his master, "that I could not get back in time to stop your going on; but I was met and turned at every point, like a hare by the greyhounds, so that I was three times as long as I need otherwise have been. However, it's quite

useless to go to Seaton ; for an embargo has been laid on all the boats, and the Tory magistrates are strong in the village. I have found out, however, from some of the old boatmen, that there is a much better chance in the Bristol channel. You mustn't go to Bristol itself, for Lord Pembroke is there, and he has probably got his orders with regard to you ; but if you can cut across to any of the little ports, or to Bridgewater, you are sure to find a ship, and seamen ready enough.—It will cost a good sum, though, they say.”

“That matters not,” said Lady Danvers. “But are you sure that he can pass ?”

“There is nothing sure in this world, dear Lady Danvers,” observed Ralph, “unless it be woman's kindness ; but, in such matters, we must take our chance, do the best we can, and leave the rest to the will of Heaven.”

“If I could have a fresh horse to-morrow morning, my lady,” said Gaunt Stilling, “I would undertake to make sure of a path. My

own beast will rest in the mean time, and my master and I can set out at night—only it would be a great deal better for you to stay here, if I may be permitted to advise, for we shall get on twice as fast on horse-back, and not draw so many eyes.”

“But it may be dangerous for him to remain here even till your return,” said Hortensia ; and, looking round to Ralph, she asked in a low voice, “ May I tell him what we have heard ?”

“ Oh yes, you can confide in him entirely,” replied Ralph. “ The truth is, Stilling, we have information that this house is to be occupied by the King’s troops, with a special injunction to apprehend me if I am found within its walls. Orders have already been sent to Lord Feversham to that effect.”

“ Lord Feversham is a gentleman, if not a soldier,” answered Gaunt Stilling, with a laugh, “ and he will do everything ceremoniously. It would be no hard matter to bamboozle him. I would undertake to pass



my master upon him for a cardinal in disguise. But I thought, sir, you had two whole days to come and go upon ?”

“What, then *you* have heard from our friend in Lincolnshire too ?” said Ralph ?

“Yes, sir,” replied the man ; “and you may depend upon what he says. Lord Feversham is near three days’ march upon the right—at least he was this morning ; and if you can but keep yourself still and quiet in the house, there is no fear till I come back. He has no cavalry to spare ; and he could not move infantry down in time, let them go as fast as they will. My plan was to let them get in advance of us, and then pass in their rear ; but if they are to occupy this house, that will not do ; and we must get in the rear of Monmouth instead. He is certain to move forward from Axminster, I suppose, after his successful skirmish, which he fought cleverly enough if he had but known how to draw good use out of it afterwards. I shall hear what he is doing, however, to-morrow ; and if he

marches towards Bath, as I think likely, we can easily cut across behind him, and get to the coast before a battle is fought."

"Do you think, then, he will fight a general battle?" asked Ralph.

"Oh, beyond doubt," answered Gaunt Stilling; "his men are bad enough, it is true, and badly armed also; but then it does not require old Greeks to beat a coxcomb like Feversham. They tell me, however, that Churchill is there, and Oglethorpe, and the Tangier regiment, and Dumbarton's; and it would require men who had smelt powder to fight those fellows."

A knock at the door at this moment, interrupted the conversation for a time; the worthy steward, partly moved perhaps by curiosity, partly by anxiety for his lady's health, having come to enquire whether she would not take some refreshment after her fatiguing journey.

Brief consultation between Ralph and

Hortensia during supper, confirmed the resolution, already half taken, to follow the counsels of Gaunt Stilling; and Lady Danvers even submitted to the necessity of leaving her young guest to seek safety alone, without offering a word of objection to that which she believed would prove most favourable to his purpose.

A horse was accordingly ordered for Stilling, to be ready early on the following morning; and Ralph and Hortensia parted to seek repose.

The next day broke dull and heavily. Drops of rain fell from time to time; the sky was covered with a mantle of gray cloud. The whole aspect of Nature was in harmony with the feelings of two dear friends about to part in peril and anxiety—to part with a dark uncertain future before them—without any knowledge to guide Hope as to the how, the where, and the when, they were to meet again.

How often is it, even when hands are

clasped, and eyes are bright with expectation, and lips murmur hopefully, "We shall soon meet again," that grim Fate stands sternly by, and puts in the dark word of contradiction, "Never!" But there are sadder partings—partings where the word of doom is heard like thunder—and partings where, though the word be not actually spoken, the frown upon the forehead of Destiny fills the heart with dread, and wild, un-hopeful doubt.

Such was the parting for which Hortensia prepared herself; but, happily for her, there was much to be done to fill up the intervening hours. The best horse of her stable had to be selected for Ralph's use—to supply the place of that which he had lost; and then she had to persuade, to insist, to argue with him, on the matter of receiving from her the means of hiring a vessel, at whatever cost, to carry him to the Dutch coast.

It is very strange; three days before, he would have had no hesitation whatever

in profiting by her kindness at once, but now he strove to avoid, to evade it. He assured her he had enough—that he had all he wanted—even while he was calculating in his own mind what amount he could obtain for the various trinkets he possessed. I will not try to look into his motives ; for he would not look into them himself, although he carried his refusal almost to a point of coldness. It was only in the end, when Hortensia, with a faltering voice, said, “For Margaret’s sake, Ralph,” that he yielded even in part, and accepted assistance which she thought infinitely small.

She made up her mind, however, as to the means of foiling his false delicacy, as she called it ; and she proceeded to execute her purpose as soon as she was left alone. It is true that she would fain have had him stay with her the whole day. Each minute seemed valuable : they were the last drops in the flask. But he had to write a letter to his father ; and, though it

was not long, the time it occupied was the dullest of the day to Hortensia. She employed a part of it, however, in executing her scheme, and sent for her steward to speak with him.

“I know not, Master Drayton,” she said, “what rents you have got in ; but circumstances exist which will speedily require more money than I have brought with me. I dare say you recollect quite well my mother’s friend Mistress Woodhall, for you must have been with my father before her death.”

“Oh, quite well, my lady,” replied Mr. Drayton, “and a beautiful creature she was.”

“Now the gentleman who is here, is her son ; and I feel towards him, and would act towards him, as a sister, if he would but let me. From circumstances, not necessary to mention, more than I have already done, it is needful that he should go to Holland as fast as possible. You can easily judge that to hire a vessel for

that voyage will, in these present times, cost a large sum. He thinks he has got quite enough. I know he has not ; but he will accept no more ; and therefore I must contrive to place the necessary funds in the hands of his servant Stilling, if you think the man is to be trusted."

"Oh, perfectly, my lady, perfectly," said Mr. Drayton. "How much does your ladyship think will be required?"

"Not less than five hundred pounds," replied Lady Danvers.

"I have not so much in the house," said Mr. Drayton, somewhat surprised ; "but I can easily get it in the course of the day, and I will get all that I can in gold, as most convenient to carry ; though the tenants often pay their rents in great heaps of silver, which take hours to count. When will it be needed, my lady?"

"Before nightfall, at all events," replied Lady Danvers. "When you have got it, Mr. Drayton, give it into the hands of the good man Stilling, for his master's use—

you had better, perhaps, take a receipt for it—and tell him to employ it at once in case of any difficulty being made about the hire of a vessel. You are sure you can trust him ?”

“Oh, quite sure,” answered Mr. Drayton. “He is very moody and rather passionate ; but as honest a man as ever lived.”

When this conversation was over, Hortensia passed the next half hour as best she might, sadly and thoughtfully enough, walking up and down the terrace before the house, in despite of the drops of rain which fell from time to time. At length she was joined by Ralph, and she resolutely strove to appear cheerful, if not happy. They conversed of many things—some bright, some dark, some pertinent to the occasion and the circumstances, some wandering far away into realms where thought, but too often, did not keep pace with words.

Thus passed hour after hour; and though, to vary the time, Hortensia and Ralph sat



down to the usual meals, but little food was taken, and thought and conversation went on as previously.

At length, about an hour before sunset, as they were sitting in a large, beautifully-furnished corner-room, which commanded two views of the park, they heard the sound of a horse's feet coming at speed, and Ralph went to the window, saying, "Here is Stilling, returned, I suppose.—No, it is a stranger in a military dress."

The man pushed his horse up the terrace, and rang the great bell without dismounting ; and Hortensia, opening the door which was near the head of the stairs, listened eagerly.

Slowly the old porter swung back the heavy house-door, and a voice from without said, "Here is a letter, addressed to the Right Honorable lady, Hortensia Baroness Danvers.—Come, take it, for I must be on to Dorchester."

"Who is it from?" asked the old porter, not appearing to hurry himself in the least.

"From the Earl of Feversham," replied the soldier. "I have had hard work to find this out-of-the-way place."

"Won't you dismount, and take a glass of ale?" enquired the porter.

But the man replied, "No, no, I must not stay."

And, turning his horse, he trotted quickly off.

"These are tidings, Ralph," said Hortensia; "let us go and ascertain their purpose."

Descending to the floor below, she met the old man with the letter in his hand. She refrained from opening it till she and Ralph were again alone, but then eagerly perused the few lines it contained. They were written in French, the Earl's native language, and contained the usual amount of unmeaning compliment and prettiness. Stripped of all verbiage, however, the purport of the letter was to inform Lady Danvers, as in gallantry and duty bound, that the position of his forces, and his line

of march. compelled him, most unwillingly, to occupy her house and park as a military post of considerable importance.

“ I have given the strictest orders,” continued Lord Feversham, “ that your charming ladyship be not put to the slightest uneasiness or inconvenience; but, as the receiving of a large body of infantry, without notice, might surprise and embarrass you, I have thought fit, in due devotion to your beautiful eyes, to overlook a little the strict line of military duty, in order to give you intimation, a whole day beforehand, that the gallant Colonel Kirke, with the Tangier regiment, will crave your hospitality to-morrow at some period between the hours of four and seven post meridian. We trust very soon to come at the end of these rebellions; and in the meantime I commend myself, my lady, to your good graces and favourable consideration.

“ FEVERSHAM.”

The eyes of Ralph and Hortensia instantly turned to the date of the letter, and with a feeling of relief they perceived that it had been written on the morning of the same day; so that four-and-twenty hours were clear before them.

“Do you know anything of this Colonel Kirke?” asked Ralph.

“Nothing whatever,” replied Hortensia; “but I know the Tangier regiment does not bear the best name in the world.”

“Of its qualities,” said Ralph, with a smile, “we can get full, though perhaps not unprejudiced, information from Stilling when he returns; for he once served in this very corps. He cannot be long now, I suppose.”

Nor was he; for he must have passed Lord Feversham's messenger very nearly at the gates of the park; and the letter had not been read ten minutes when he entered the room.

“Well, Stilling, what news?” said his

master. "I was beginning to be somewhat anxious for your return."

"Plenty of time, sir, plenty of time," responded Gaunt Stilling; "and my news is good. A schooner or a brig can certainly be hired in the channel, and at no very hard rate. The way, too, is open; for Monmouth is moving to the eastward, as I expected. The people behind him are all in his favour, and the magistrates are powerless. No warrants run there. Still, as parties of troops are scouring about here and there, no one knows where, it will be better to take the low horse-road which leaves Taunton and all those towns on one side. I was only afraid that some of the King's officers might have occupied the little hamlet at St. Mary's, in order to command that road; and that Monmouth might have left it behind unnoticed, thinking he could force it at any time. I find, however, that a part of Oglethorpe's corps, which was quartered there, retreated this morning for fear they should be cut off; so

that the way is clear and easy to Bridgewater, where we shall be sure to hear of ships."

"We shall have ample time, too," observed Ralph; "for Colonel Kirke will certainly not be here before four o'clock to-morrow afternoon."

"Colonel Kirke! Colonel Kirke!" exclaimed Gaunt Stilling, with an air of consternation. "Is *he* coming here?"

"So we are informed by Lord Feversham," said Hortensia. "Do you know anything of that gentleman?"

"God's life, my Lady, quite enough," replied Gaunt Stilling; "pray, forgive me. But who is coming with him?"

"The Tangier regiment, which he commands, I believe," answered Lady Danvers. "You know something of them, Mr. Woodhall tells me."

"I know this, my Lady," rejoined Gaunt Stilling, "that, if they come here and Kirke at their head, this house is no place for you, or any lady, or any poor girl either. It is

impossible, sir," he continued, turning to Ralph, "that Lady Danvers can remain here, if Kirke and these Tangier men are coming. I served with them three years in Africa; and if I had been inclined to disbelieve in the existence of a devil, I should have had no doubt afterwards, for I had more than four hundred real ones all round me, and the arch-fiend at their head.—I beg your pardon, my Lady, for speaking so plainly, especially as not long ago I was all for having you stay here, and letting Mr. Woodhall and myself find our way alone. But now I see it cannot be done. You must not remain an hour—nay, not ten minutes—in the same house with Kirke and the Tangier men. There is no knowing what they have done, and what they will dare to do.—Oh, if I could but tell you all I know!—You must either come with us, or let us see you to some place of safety."

Lady Danvers smiled sadly. "I fear I must not go with you," she said, "if

you mean to Holland ; but I have friends both in the neighbourhood of Wells and of Bristol, who will gladly give me refuge."

"Then, madam, if you will take my advice," returned Gaunt Stilling, "you will take care of your plate, and the pretty little knick-knacks that I see lying about all over the house ; or you will find clear boards when you come back again."

"I will order all the rooms to be locked up," said Hortensia, "except those where the men must sleep."

"The Tangier regiment don't mind locks, my Lady," said Gaunt Stilling, gravely. "There is always an excuse for breaking a lock, especially where there are non-jurors and dissenters about. Doors would open very fast, and with two or three hundred witnesses, you would have two or three hundred accomplices. Ask Tom if his brother's a thief ! No, no, my Lady, take my advice ; put everything of value into small drawers which would not hold an infant, or they'll break in to see if there's a



dissenting minister. Consign all your plate to the plate-chests ; and when you come back, you may think yourself very lucky if you do not find the eyes of your grandfather bored with a pike, or the portrait of your mother shot through with a musket—just to see if there be not a concealed door behind the canvas. Feed them well, or they will feed themselves better ; and disperse all the women of the household over the parish—that is to say under eighty. The men must take care of themselves ; and a hard time enough they will have of it—some heads broken, if not driven in, before you come back, I will warrant.”

“ You lay me out work for a long time, Master Stilling,” said Hortensia. “ What is to be done, Ralph ? ”

“ Take his advice, dear Lady,” replied Ralph Woodhall. “ Let me aid you in your arrangements, at once and immediately. Then lie down, and take a short repose, and let us set off before day-light

to-morrow. We will see you safe to Wells, and I shall depart with a lighter heart."

Gaunt Stilling did not appear to be quite satisfied, but he made no observation ; and various servants being called, Lady Danvers explained to Mr. Drayton that she was under the necessity of quitting her own dwelling, as she had received information from Lord Feversham that Danvers Newchurch was about to be occupied as a military post by Colonel Kirke and the Tangier regiment.

"'Od bless my life, my Lady! that's bad news indeed," cried the steward, rubbing his hands in an agony of perplexity. "Why, it is the worst regiment in the whole service—nothing like it in all the civilized world—a mere band of licensed robbers and plunderers, especially their colonel. Gracious! what shall we do with all the things that are about?"

"We must lock them up safely," said Lady Danvers ; "and that was one reason for my sending for you, Mr. Drayton. We

must all set to work as hard as possible : the carriage and horses must be round at the door before three. But I will not take more men with me than is needful. My maid Alice must go. The rest of the women you had better disperse amongst the farm-houses and in the neighbouring villages, till the storm has blown by ; and you must take the best care of these men who are coming that you can."

END OF VOL. II.

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